

School of Theology at Claremont



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THE GOSPEL
ACCORDING TO
: ST. JOHN :
: I - VI :
: REV. :
T.W. GILBERT, D.D.

A DEVOTIONAL
: COMMENTARY :



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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

Edited by the Rev. C. H. IRWIN, D.D.

THE
GOSPEL ACCORDING
TO ST. JOHN

I—VI

By the

Rev. T. W. GILBERT, D.D.

Rector of Bradfield, Berks



LONDON

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INTRODUCTION

THE Gospel of St. John is a unique book in the divine library known as the Bible. Each of the books of the Bible has its own particular significance and value, and each of them makes its own appeal to the reader, but the Gospel of St. John has an attraction which in some ways far surpasses that of any other book of the Bible. This is not because it deals with subjects which are not found elsewhere in the Gospels and Epistles; it is rather because St. John has concentrated attention upon certain outstanding needs and aspirations of man, and has shown how those needs can be met and those aspirations realised. Deep down in the heart of every man is the longing for a nobler life, and a craving for life on higher levels. In the mind of every man also there is a hope for a better life when the period of this life is ended; there is an instinctive desire that somehow and somewhere a more perfect life may be lived. Allied with this is a revolt from the feeling that the grave ends all. Men feel instinctively that the hopes and ideals

A unique
book.

Introduction

within them are not to be bounded by the grave, and they trust that in another world they will continue what they have begun here. Such longings and desires, which are the general experience of mankind, are part of the hope of immortality which seem inseparable from the human race.

To meet these and such-like longings St. John's Gospel was written. St. John himself had been resident in Asia Minor for many years, and, according to tradition, lived at the important town of Ephesus. Here he met men of many nationalities and of differing creeds, some of which were favourable to Christianity, but most of which were unfavourable. Yet this does not seem to have been the motive which prompted St. John to write his Gospel; it was not merely an attempt to write a defence of the faith in which he believed. The influence impelling him to the task was quite different from this. He himself was now a very old man, he had had a long life-experience of what Christ had done for him, and what faith in Christ meant for him. He saw men round him seeking to solve the mystery of life, he saw others looking for some means to raise the level of their lives, he found men everywhere craving for some knowledge and assurance of what happens after this life is over. In short, he saw around him men with the

The real
motive of
the writer.

Introduction

hopes common to humanity; and to questioning humanity St. John gave a God-directed answer in his Gospel.

He says, in verses thirty and thirty-one of chapter twenty, that he has made a choice out of the many things he knows our Lord had done, and that he has arranged his material in the hope that the reading of what he has written may produce a belief in Christ which will ensure "life in His name." He states clearly that he has not written a complete record of our Lord's doings, but that he has made a choice and an arrangement in the hope that "life" from Christ may come to those who study what he has written.

For the work which St. John did we can humbly and reverently thank God. We, like the people of Asia Minor, are but human, and the feelings common to humanity are ours. We know the limitations of our own lives, and we desire to live better and purer lives; we know also the longings for immortality and our hope of re-union in the next world with those whom death has taken from us. Can God help us, and will He help us in realising these hopes?

St. John's Gospel gives the answer to these and to many other such questions. It points us to Christ as the source of all true life, and it leads us to Him as the Giver of life to all who believe

Introduction

in Him. It shows us that because Christ Himself is One with the Father, the life of Christ is the life of the Father. The man, therefore, who receives life from Christ, receives life from the eternal God; he receives the perfect and eternal life for which he seeks.

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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST. JOHN

I

CHRIST THE WORD OF GOD

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.—ST. JOHN I. 1.

THE Gospel of St. John is arranged on a definite **St. John** plan, and the deliberate arrangement, as St. John **i. 1.** tells us, is for the purpose of leading men to a belief in Christ as the Son of God, and by that belief to secure eternal life (xx. 30, 31). The actual plan of the Gospel seems to begin with the second chapter, and the whole of the first chapter is introductory to the main scheme. The first eighteen verses were probably written last of all, and they sum up what St. John thinks of our Lord ; they testify to his conception of Christ and to his deliberate conviction of who Christ was.

The essence of St. John's ideas, however, is contained in the first five verses, and the most important fact of all comes in the first verse, *i.e.* "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John

i. 1.

"The
Word."

It will be seen that our Lord is referred to in this verse as the "Word," and the expression illustrates more than one truth about Christ's work. To take the more obvious interpretation first. We know how we use "words" to convey our thoughts to one another; "words" are the expression of the ideas and feelings which we wish to convey one to the other. There is, of course, such a thing as the silent intercourse of friend with friend, and there is the possibility of a community of feeling which can make itself felt even without words. But "words" are essential for friendship, because in "words" the terms of friendship are stated and the feelings of friendship are expressed. The closest earthly relationships of friendship are based upon mutual love, or kindredship of spirit, or upon community of ideals, but these relationships are only cemented as those feelings are seen and expressed through the medium of words. It is through "words" that we know the innermost thoughts of each other, and it is through "words" that we really know each other.

This is the first great truth which underlies the designation of our Lord as the "Word." He is the "Word" because He tells us who God is, and what God is like. We long to know God and we seek information about Him, because we are aware that once we know God all the mysteries of life will be solved. And to all inquiring souls Christ says, "I am the 'Word' of God, I speak of God, God speaks through Me, He delivers His message to you through Me."

— Yet He is not the "Word" of God simply because

Christ the Word of God

He speaks the "words" of God. In so far as **St. John** Christ by His spoken messages declares God's **i. i.** truth, He is speaking the "words" of God, and in this sense He is the "word" of God, revealing to men God's mind and God's character. But Christ is the "Word" of God in a far more real sense than that. An inspired prophet may speak the "words" of God, he may, like Isaiah or St. John, be the recipient of heavenly visions, he may, like St. Paul, be caught up to the third heaven and hear the things of God, but their inspired testimony leaves them still men like ourselves. Our Lord is in a very different category from this. He is the "Word" not simply because His utterances tell us of God, but because He Himself in His Person and by His acts shows us who and what God is. He tells us that the Father and He are One, and that those who see Christ see the Father Who sent Him (St. John xii. 45). As we look at the life of Christ, therefore, we see the character of God at work in the world. We see His pity for the weak and poor and helpless, His tenderness for the sick and afflicted, His mercy for the sinful and outcast, His scorn for the hypocritical and time-serving. Or, again, we think of the many-sidedness of Christ in His appeal to the tenderest and noblest instincts of men, women and children, we see the self-sacrifice which sought dominion by the crown of thorns and the Cross of Calvary. The words and the works of Christ speak to us of God. Our Lord, therefore, is the "Word" of God not merely in the sense that by His lips He tells us of God, but also because His

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John
i. 1.

whole life reveals God to us. Just as the words and actions of an individual reveal his own character, so our Lord in Himself and by the life He lived on earth showed who and what God is.

The Greek
meaning of
"Logos."

There is a further interpretation of the term "Word," which is involved in understanding the term for "word" in Greek, which is Logos. Much has been written to show how St. John was influenced by what is called the "Logos doctrine" of philosophers like Philo, but it is clear that St. John's use of the term is distinctive, and owes nothing to Philo. What Philo and the Greek philosophers meant by Logos was the voice of reason, something which was a mere abstraction, but to St. John the Logos was our Lord Himself.

Aristotle
and Philo.

There is a certain connection of ideas, however, which will be found helpful by Christian readers. The word "Logos" meant more than what we mean by its English equivalent, *i.e.* "word." Logos to the Greeks meant "speech," and it also meant the voice of reason expressing itself in words. A practical illustration of how the idea was used may be seen in Aristotle's *Politics*. He is trying to show how life in a city or state is a natural thing for men. In order to prove this he explains that men have been given the faculty of speech which differentiates them from animals. Animals may congregate together, and they may have a community of sensation and feeling, but the condition of man is different. Man has been given the power of speech, or Logos, and the power of speech carries with it the voice of reason expressed in speech,

Christ the Word of God

and this binds men together in a state. The very **St. John** fact that man has been given Logos shows that he **i. i.** has rational instincts, such as a knowledge of what is just and unjust, and these rational instincts can only find full expression in a state. Such, roughly, is Aristotle's idea, and the thought is taken up by philosophers like Philo. The latter tries to explain the relation between God and the universe, and he seeks to show that there is some intermediary or some intermediate agency between God and the world. But his teaching is always abstract, his Logos is not a person but only the principle of reason.

Living as he did in Ephesus, in the midst of a Greek-speaking people and among people who were familiar with Greek ideas, St. John was quite conversant with what Philo had been teaching about the Logos. But St. John took the expression and used it to explain how Christ was the Logos for which they were seeking. Men want to see the relation between God and the universe, they see it through Jesus Christ. They want to know the purpose of life in this world, and they find it in Jesus Christ. They seek to solve the mysteries of sin and salvation, and they get the solution through Jesus Christ. They want light on the mystery of death and on the life to come, and they find it in Jesus Christ.

To St. John, therefore, our Lord was the Logos for whom men were seeking, because He came direct from the bosom of the Father to show the connection of God with the world, and through

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John i. 1. Himself to offer the solution of all the mysteries of life. He is the Logos of God, speaking the secrets of God and explaining the purposes of God. Just as "logos" binds the citizens together in the Aristotelian state, so Jesus Christ, the Logos of God, binds us together with Him to God Himself. Jesus fulfils all that men were looking for because He is the voice of God, speaking of God, and explaining the ways of God to man.

The God-head of Christ.

When we ask in all reverence how this can be, and how it is possible that any one can be the Logos to reveal the mind of God to men, we are brought back by St. John to the fundamental fact which is the basis of our Christian faith. The Word, Who reveals God to men, was existing in the beginning of all things. Before the world was, before the universe was, before time was, the Word of God was. The eternal existence of our Lord is a fact which underlies many truths, but St. John records it here to make clear one truth above all else, and that is the Godhead of our Lord Jesus Christ. Christ was in the beginning with God, and He existed in the beginning with God, because He was Himself God. This fact lends itself to much reflection, but the great thought uppermost in the mind of St. John in emphasising this truth is a practical one. St. John is pointing men to Christ as the Revealer of God, he is proclaiming our Lord to the world as the Word or Logos of God, Who speaks the mind of God and shows the character of God. Christ can do this, for the practical reason that He Himself is God.

Christ the Word of God

Such a truth fills us with reverent awe and love. **St. John**
We stand before the Cross and we marvel that **i. i.**
Christ the Son of God should allow Himself to
suffer thus for us men and for our salvation. But
the same thought of marvel confronts us here.
It is a wondrous thing that Christ, the eternal God,
existing from all eternity, should voluntarily leave
the glory of heaven, that He should have submitted
Himself to all the limitations of manhood (Phil. ii.
6-8) in order to make God and His ways known
to men. But it is the truth which our Lord Him-
self proclaimed, the truth which His disciples
taught, and the truth for which Christianity stands.

In Christ I feel the heart of God
Throbbing from heaven through earth,
Life stirs again within the clod,
Renewed in beauteous birth :
The soul springs up, a flower of prayer,
Breathing His breath out on the air.

In Christ, I touch the hand of God
From His pure height reached down,
By blessed ways before untrod,
To lift us to our crown :
Victory that only perfect is
Through loving sacrifice like His.

Holding His hand—my steadied feet
May walk the air, the seas :
On life and death His smile falls sweet,
Lights up all mysteries :
Stranger nor exile can I be
In new worlds where He leadeth me.

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The Gospel According to St. John

St. John

i. 1.

PRAYER

O God Who hast revealed Thyself to mankind through Thy Son Jesus Christ, enable us by Thy grace to draw near to Thee through Him. Teach us to see in Him all that Thou wouldest have us know concerning Thee, so that we may learn to live in accordance with what Thou hast made known to us. Through the merits of Thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

II

THE ETERNAL CHRIST—THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD HE MADE

The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him ; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life ; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness ; and the darkness comprehended it not.—ST. JOHN I. 2-5.

SINCE our Lord Jesus Christ was the “ Word ” of St. John God in the sense we have just considered, and i. 2-5. because, moreover, He was God in the fullest sense of that term, it follows that there was never a time when He did not exist. As St. John puts it, “ the same was in the beginning with God ” ; but it is well to remember that he is not merely stating that Christ existed in the beginning just prior to the creation of the world. St. John is asserting that our Lord existed in the “ very beginning,” and that just as no one can date the beginning of the existence of God, so no one can date the beginning of the existence of Christ. Whatever we can say of the eternal existence of God the Father, that also we declare of our Lord.

In this we are dealing, of course, with a matter which is beyond human understanding. Situated as we are in a world which is not eternal, but in a

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John
i. 2-5.

world whose beginnings we can trace and whose ending we can theorise about, we see nothing around us which can interpret eternity for us. We look at ourselves, for instance ; we see the rapidity with which life passes, and we feel how the " three-score years and ten " make life seem so ephemeral. No wonder that men have so often felt that human life is a " mere space between two eternities." In the world and in human existence there is little to tell us what eternity is.

St. John, however, asserts, and the minds of all men agree to the assertion, that prior to the creation of the world, God existed. But St. John also declares, that to which the Christian agrees, that our Lord also existed prior to the creation, and that, in the ages of eternity which preceded the coming of the universe into being, Christ existed with God.

Creation.

This prepares us for the statement that " all things were made by Him ; and without Him was not any thing made that was made." Here we have a truth which is very often overlooked by many people, for men have had very erroneous ideas about the world in which we live. Some have talked as though the world did not belong to God. They have argued that there are so many evil things in the world, and that sorrow and suffering are so prevalent, and evil seems triumphant in so many ways, that the idea of God being the Creator and Owner of the world seems far from their thought. Many people indeed have gone to the length of asserting that the world belongs to the devil himself, because the power of the evil one seems para-

The Eternal Christ

mount, and only in another life in another world **St. John** do they think that the power of God will be seen. **i. 2-5.**

Much of such pessimism is due to the limited outlook which sees only the evil around us, but it is an absolutely false view of the world, just as it gives a very distorted view of life.

There are others, again, who think of the world as having been created by God the Father, and who, moreover, have full and complete trust in the providence of God overruling the world. But their thoughts about the creation of the world are confined as a rule to the part played by God the Father in bringing the universe into existence. Such a view has a tendency to keep the Father somewhat remote in the thoughts of many Christians. There is a vague kind of feeling which keeps God the Father quite in the background as One who set the world in motion, and then only intervened occasionally, as in His revelation to the Israelites and in His fuller revelation in Christ.

But St. John in this verse unfolds a truth which throws a flood of light upon the world, and upon the purposes and plans of God in it. For the truth which St. John emphasises is that our Lord Himself took part in the work of Creation, and that nothing came into being without the co-operation of Christ. "All things were made by Christ and apart from Christ was not any thing made that was made"—such is the impressive truth asserted by St. John, a truth referred to in the Nicene Creed when it declares that our Lord is "very God of very God," and that by Him "all things were made."

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John
i. 2-5.

What a different feeling this gives us with regard to the world in which we live! We look around us and we are puzzled time and again by many things. The inequalities of life, the mystery of suffering, the mystery of sin; these and many other such things give us a good deal of heart-searching at times, and if we look at them merely as non-Christians look at them, we are apt to do so either in despair, or with a kind of fatalism, or possibly even with a feeling of indignation that God should allow them. But as Christians we look at Christ, we see His life of love and pity and tenderness, we see His hand outstretched to help, we hear His voice guiding the perplexed, we see Him leading His followers, and as they follow where He leads they enter into a joy and peace which surmounts every other experience.

We link these facts together therefore. This world is Christ's world, for it was made by Him. The course of the world has not gone as He would like, because the free-will of men has caused many things to be done which cause Him sorrow and shame. Jesus "weeping over Jerusalem" is only one of many similar incidents, for—if we may say so—there is a constant tear in the eye of Christ as He sees the un-Christlike character of men. Yet with all the shortcomings of men the world still belongs to Christ. It is His, because He brought it into being, and it remains His. And we are certain, as we read His life depicted for us in the Gospels, that that life was lived for the purpose of bringing the world of men back to what He wanted

The Eternal Christ

them to be. Nay, we know that just because this **St. John** world was made by Him, for that very reason **He i. 2-5.** came into the world to show men the true way to live.

Since, moreover, Christ came to His own world, **Redemp-** to show men the way they ought to live in His world, **tion.** it is not difficult to understand the meaning of Redemption. Christ's world had fallen below the ideal He had fixed for it. Men and women were either content to acquiesce in a standard of life below the ideal in the mind of Christ, or else, if they still retained the high ideal, they were incapable of realising it. Christ's creation had failed of His purpose. All this shows us the meaning of Christ coming into the world, and it throws light upon the manner of His life and death, for His life and death were to redeem His own world, they were to call back His own creation to Himself and to His own standard of life.

This great truth that Christ Himself created the world of men and of things therefore brings hope and encouragement as we look to Him our Creator.

This is evidently the thought in the mind of St. John when he goes on to say that "in Him was life: and the life was the light of men." If we take the words as they stand, they put on record the whole purpose of our Lord Jesus Christ for men. "Life" means true living and full living. It implies self-realisation of the best kind, it means a full and vigorous existence, and it connotes a heart "in tune with the Infinite." The implication of the word is a sure-footed walk in this

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John
i. 2-5.
Life.

world, with feet planted solidly upon the earth, but with head uplifted to catch the heavenly inspiration. It means, to put it simply and shortly, a God-inspired active existence amid a somewhat difficult world, it means a life linked up with that of Christ Who is "the Author and Giver of life." In this we have the keynote to St. John's Gospel, as well as to his Epistle, and it is the keynote to the writings of the "beloved disciple" simply because it sums up the whole mission of Christ.

"'Tis Life whereof our nerves are scant,
More life and fuller that we want."

The quotation is familiar enough, and the need which it summarises is inseparable from human existence. In the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ that need is completely met, for in Him is "Life."

The same aspect of the mission of Christ is suggested by another translation of the end of verse three and the beginning of verse four. This alternate rendering would run as follows, *i.e.* "All things were made by Him : and without Him was not any thing made. That which was made was life in Him, and the life was the light of men."

Such a translation would make no difference to the actual purpose for which Christ came into the world, but it throws us back upon the fundamental fact which we considered in verse three. It brings us again face to face with the truth that our Lord not only created the world, and that He, with the Father, not only brought the universe into being, but that His creatures were formed with a definite

The Eternal Christ

purpose. Man is therefore not only concerned with **St. John**

“One far-off Divine event

i. 2-5.

To which the whole creation moves,”

as Tennyson declares, but he is also inspired by the one far-off fact from which creation started. St. John is, of course, not necessarily stating anything foreclosing theories of evolution, but he is emphatically asserting Christ's purpose for man. The purpose is revealed in the original design, which is summed up in the words “that which was made was life in Him.” This is the original God-purposed destiny of man. Man was created with the intention of drawing the inspiration of his being from Christ Himself. He failed to see clearly the God-given directions found in the pre-Christian era, and he neglected to use as he might the inspired suggestions of prophet or sage. The Christ-life was seen, however dimly, in such messengers of God as Moses and Isaiah, or in lesser degree in such teachers as Plato or Confucius. The fullness of the time came, however, when Christ in His own Person came on earth to give men Life, and the purpose of creation is effected as men turn to receive Life from Christ their Maker.

And in the new Life there is a clearer vision. “In **Life and Light.** Thy Life shall we see Light,” for the world becomes a different place to him who has received new life from Christ. It is not that the world has in reality become different, but we ourselves have become different, and because we have become different we are looking upon the things of this world with a completely changed vision. We can still see the

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John
i. 2-5. miseries and the sins and the suffering, we can still feel in a very real sense that "the times are out of joint," but we are looking now with greater hope and surer optimism as we understand something of Christ's purposes for the world. Life from Christ means also Light from Christ to all who see with Christ's vision.

But there is another general truth which remains fixed in the mind of St. John about the eternal Christ, the Giver of Life and Light, and that is the manner in which the world in general received the Light. This is brought out in verse five, the latter half of which is capable of two somewhat different translations. If we take the translation as given in the Authorised Version it runs, "and the light shineth in darkness: and the darkness comprehended it not." Such a translation implies that men were waiting for the coming of Christ, and that something in the manner of His coming prevented men understanding Him and receiving Him. It may have been His life of self-sacrifice, the demands made upon men for personal service, the high ideal of purity of thought and motive, or possibly the felon's death on Calvary. Or was it that men were content with life on a low level, that they really preferred darkness rather than light, that they had so long acquiesced in a commonplace, unspiritual existence that they did not desire to escape from it? Both suggestions are possible, and they each of them imply the spiritual hardening and consequent spiritual blindness which is the outcome of a life lived continuously on a low plane.

The Eternal Christ

The other translation alters the word "comprehended" into "overcame," so that the verse in this sense runs, "the light shineth in darkness : and the darkness overcame it not." This is probably the more correct translation of the two, for it is grammatically right, and it also rounds off St. John's thoughts in the introductory five verses. He began his Gospel with the statement of the eternity of Christ the Word, he placed on record the Godhead of Christ and the fact that to Him all existence was due, he emphasised the truth that the purpose of creation, for which Christ was responsible, was that men should have Life and Light in and through Him. Along with these truths was the fact that darkness had settled upon the souls of men, a darkness made up of uncertainty about God, perplexity about life and death, and acquiescence in a low standard of life.

To such a darkness came our Lord Jesus Christ, as Light penetrating the darkness. The Light was a beacon of hope for some, and He was a guide to others. But there were others who preferred the darkness, and who were roused to opposition when their low ideals were thrown into prominence by the Light coming from the Son of God. That opposition is noticeable in the second year of our Lord's public ministry, it developed in intensity in the last year of His life, and it culminated on Calvary. It seemed then that the darkness had overcome the Light, and that the story of the life of Christ was but the greatest example of "the light that failed."

St. John
i. 2-5.
A better
translation
of v. 5.

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St. John
i. 2-5.

St. John, however, is looking upon the history of the Christian Church extending to near the end of the first century. He realises what Christ has meant to himself, and he sees what His Master has done for countless others. He knows—and the last few verses of his first Epistle with their reiteration of “we know” evidences this—the reality of the Life and Light he possesses from Christ, and he understands that Calvary was not the end but only a beginning. Darkness did not overcome the Light then, and the powers of darkness did not triumph when Christ “was despised and rejected of men.”

So this section of the introduction to the Gospel ends on a firm historical note. It begins with the eternal Word, the Creator of men, it ends with the coming of that eternal Word to live among the men He created. It begins with the eternal Life and Light of men, it closes with the manifestation of that Life and Light in the Person of Christ. Commencing with God and eternity, it summarises the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ by Whose life and death the powers of darkness were overcome.)

PRAYER

Look upon us, O Lord, and let all the darkness of our souls vanish before the beams of Thy brightness. Fill us with holy love, and open to us the treasures of Thy wisdom. All our desire is known unto Thee, therefore perfect what Thou hast begun, and what Thy Spirit hast awakened us to ask in prayer. We seek Thy face, turn Thy face unto us and show us Thy glory. Then shall our longing be satisfied, and our peace shall be perfect. *Amen.*—(ST. AUGUSTINE.)

III

JOHN—THE WITNESS TO CHRIST THE LIGHT

There was a man sent from God, whose name *was* John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all *men* through him might believe. He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light.—ST. JOHN I. 6-8.

IN the previous sections of the Prologue St. John has enunciated eternal truths about our Lord and His Divinity, but he now goes on to record certain facts made patent when the incarnate Son of God came to live as man. The treatment of the subject is still very general. The writer has a bird's-eye view, so to speak, of our Lord's ministry and of its effects upon mankind, he has the long view which sees the end as well as the beginning of Christ's life, and he can stand back from the facts before him and interpret them on bold general lines.

The first fact of which he speaks is the appearance of John the Baptist, and the Baptist is referred to in the phrase "there was a man sent from God, whose name was John." Now, in these words St. John is drawing attention to two things. In the first place, he seems to be making a contrast between the eternal Christ about Whom he has been writing. The verb which is translated in the Authorised Version as "was" (*i.e.* there WAS a

Contrast
with
Christ.

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St. John
i. 6-8.

man sent . . .) is a Greek verb which means "to become," and so the sense of the phrase is that "a man CAME INTO BEING, sent from God, whose name was John." The writer has been absorbed with the idea of the Godhead and eternity of Christ, the Word of God, and he seems to feel the need of expressing the contrast with the eternal Christ, when he begins to record the work of others. So he declares that while the son of God existed from all eternity, a man in the person of the Baptist "arose," or "came into being," because in contrast with the eternal son of God there was a time when he did not exist.

A
Messenger.

But whilst the Baptist is differentiated from the eternal Christ, as a finite being whose origin was known, he has the distinguishing characteristic that he was "sent from God." The description implies a messenger, and one who is equipped for a specific purpose. It carries us back in mind to Malachi's prophecy, "Behold, I will send my messenger" (Mal. iii. 1, iv. 5), and it carries us forward to the Apostles who in their turn were "sent" forth as messengers of God. But the link is rather with the past than with the future. The disciples, as Apostles, were "sent" to tell what they knew from their own experience, they preached what they knew of the Lord and Master Whom they had served, and by Whom they had been taught. This, obviously, could not be the case with the Baptist. He was six months older than our Lord, and no indication is given in the Gospels that he had been instructed beforehand by Christ in any private

John—The Witness to Christ

intercourse they may have had. Nay, we know **St. John** from the Gospels what difficulties John had in re-**i. 6-8.** conciling the mission of our Lord with his own ideas (cf. St. Matt. xi. 2-6). The Baptist therefore did not receive his inspiration from the earthly Christ whom he knew; he received it, as the Old Testament prophets had received it, from God Himself.

This is further borne out by the statement **His** explaining John's mission. "The same came for **witness.** a witness," so runs the first part of verse seven, but the more accurate rendering would be "the same came for witness." The omission of the indefinite article tends to emphasise that the whole purpose of the existence of the Baptist was for the one absorbing and exclusive purpose of "witnessing." He was not merely "a witness" who spoke and testified to the coming of Christ, but his whole life "witnessed" to Christ. The circumstances of his birth, his Nazarite outlook, his wilderness life, his stern views of the laxity of the lives of his fellow-countrymen, his preaching of the Messiah, his testimonies to Christ—in short his whole life and teaching "witnessed" to the coming of the Son of God.

Moreover, and this seems to be one of the great **Verse 8.** points in St. John's mind, the Apostle is insistent on the difference between the Baptist and the Master to Whom he witnessed. To us such a distinction seems self-evident, but it was not always so clear. The Baptist's witness at once roused the Jewish people of his day. The men of Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region round about

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St. John
1. 6-8.

Jordan crowded round him as he preached in the wilderness of Judea (St. Matt. iii. 5). As they heard his stern preaching on the need for repentance, they saw in him the spirit of the Old Testament prophets, and they felt that he was at least a prophet, possibly the prophet foretold by Moses (Deut. xviii. 15), or possibly the long-expected Messiah (St. John i. 20). They felt that the Baptist was the true heir of such pillars of the race as Moses and Isaiah, that he spoke the stern exhortations of Amos, and had the spiritual insight of Hosea. It was by no means unnatural that the men of his day thought that the Baptist might be the promised Messiah.

In addition, there were people outside of Palestine who had come under the influence of the Baptist's teaching, and who had no knowledge of the Master to Whom he came for witness. One striking example of this is seen in the first six verses of Acts xix. St. Paul found at Ephesus a body of people who followed the teaching of John the Baptist, but who obviously had not heard of our Lord and His teaching. This may not have been an isolated case in the countries outside of Palestine, although we can hardly conceive it probable in Judea and Galilee. St. John, who was himself resident at Ephesus, feels it necessary, however, to allow no possibility of confusion as to the fundamental difference between Christ and the Baptist. So he declares that Christ is eternal, the Baptist is finite ; Christ is God, the Baptist is "sent from God" ; Christ is the Light of men, the Baptist is one who

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witnessed to the coming Light. The Baptist was St. John great in the eyes of his own generation, but with i. 6-8. true prophetic insight he declared that Christ must increase and he himself must decrease as the world sees in Christ the incarnate son of God (St. John iii. 27-30). If men in their expectations imagined that he was the Messiah, it was not the Baptist's fault, but persistently even unto death he bore his witness to the true Light which was then coming into the world.

The Apostle wants to keep this truth clear. It is in no sense a minimising of the Baptist and his work, but it is in every sense the exaltation of the Master above the servant. John might be "a lamp that burneth and shineth," and men might be "willing to rejoice for a season in his light" (St. John v. 35), but John was as a lamp to the noon-day sun, in comparison with his Master. The lamp gave light in the gloom, but the light of the lamp was not needed when the Sun came. The lamp guided through the darkness towards the Light, but when the Light was reached the work of the lamp was done.

PRAYER

O Lord Jesu Christ, Who at Thy first coming did send Thy messenger to prepare Thy way before Thee, Grant that the ministers and stewards of Thy mysteries may likewise so prepare and make ready Thy way, by turning the hearts of the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, that at Thy second coming to judge the world we may be found an acceptable people in Thy sight, Who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. *Amen.*—(*Book of Common Prayer.*)

IV

CHRIST—THE LIGHT OF MEN

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.—ST. JOHN I. 9-11.

**St. John
i. 9-11.**

ST. JOHN now passes in mind from the Witness to the Master, and just as he summarises the mission and work of the Baptist so he also summarises the mission and work of Christ.

He starts with the fact that our Lord “was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” The words as they appear in the Authorised Version emphasise the contrast between the Baptist who witnessed to the Light and our Lord Who Himself was the Light. It is, however, only in a particular sense true that our Lord lighteth EVERY MAN that cometh into the world. Christ does bring light to all who believe in Him, He sheds a light on the mysteries of God and of heaven, He displays a light by which we can walk through this world, and His Presence in every respect brings light. But the light He gives is for those who know Him and trust Him, the full light of the Master is for those who give themselves unreservedly to Him. The Light, in this sense therefore, does not light “EVERY MAN that cometh

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into the world," because many men have not yet heard of Christ, and many more do not listen when they hear of Him. **St. John i. 9-11.**

A better translation of the words is given in the Revised Version as follows: *i.e.* "There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world." This translation brings out certain truths which are not quite so clear in the Authorised Version. In the first place, it lays stress on the fact of the pre-existence of our Lord. Verses 3 and 4 of the Prologue have emphasised the Eternal Being of Christ and His Oneness with the Father. St. John is slowly moving in mind from the thoughts of eternity to the introduction of the Eternal God into a world of time, but his mind is still lingering on the Eternal Christ. "There was the true Light coming into the world" he says, and it is the first part of the sentence which is foremost in his mind. He is thinking for the moment not so much about man, but about Christ Who is the Light of men, and Christ the Light is a Figure Who stands in the mind of St. John as existing prior to the existence of man. **The true light coming into the world.**

But along with this, there is another important truth embedded in the words, if we put the sentence in what is probably the true grammatical order, *i.e.* "There was the true Light coming into the world, which lighteth every man." Here the thought is that Christ, even in His pre-incarnate existence, was the One who guided men. It opens up the by-no-means easy problem of the extent to which men were guided and helped by our Lord

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**St. John
i. 9-11.**

before He came into the world as man. It gives us, however, the very suggestive thought that our Lord, by Whose agency the world came into being, was also the One through Whom all the prophets and sages of pre-Christian times were guided and inspired, and that our Lord in His pre-human existence illuminated and directed the souls of men.

Verse 10.

If this be so, and the grammatical rendering of the verse seems to make it so, then we can understand with even greater clearness why our Lord came into the world as man. He had made the world of men and of things, and He had given the light of His directing self to guide the consciences of men in His world. But they had failed to profit by the light He had given. He was in the world from the beginning, and the world was made by Him, but the world knew Him not. God's world had become man's world, where God was not recognised. In the face of such a result, what was more natural than that God in Christ should come to live among men? and what more natural than that He should come to give a clearer light still to the race He had created?

Verse 11.

So St. John sees the perfectly natural reason why our Lord came into the world to live among men the Perfect Life, and by that Life to shed Light among men. "He came unto His own," and as the word "own" is neuter, it seems to refer to the world as a whole which belonged to Christ, and so St. John sees Christ coming into the world which was His own possession. But in the world which was His own possession there were those called

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“His own” who received Him not. This is St. John obviously a reference to our Lord’s own people, i. 9–11. the Jews. To them had been given a clearer and stronger light for guidance than had been given to other races of men, and it was perfectly natural that when Christ should come to His world in human form, He should do so as a member of the race through whom He had spoken in His pre-incarnate days.

But St. John sees the tragedy of the rejection of Christ by “His own people.” It was the tragedy of ignorance which failed to recognise the Lord of the Universe and their own Master, but it was not a mere casualness which lightly rejected the Person of the Son of God. His life was lived among them, His light was shed abroad among them, His teaching and example were primarily for them, but they “received” Him not. They refused to accept all that He offered. Was it the fact of His birth of a human parent which blinded their eyes? It may have been so. They were looking for the Messiah, One Who should be the special revelation of Jehovah, and Who should radically alter the position of the nation for good. But He came in no mysterious fashion as they had anticipated, He came “a little baby thing that made a woman cry.” Was this the cause why they “received Him not”? Or was it the ordinary character of the home from which He came? Did they feel that there was something incongruous in the appearance of God in the home of a Nazarene carpenter? It may have been so, since the Jews sought God in the Temple

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St. John i. 9-11. and looked for His teaching amongst the rabbis only.

We know now, however, that the very things which were a stumbling-block to the Jews are those which draw us near to Christ to-day. We can see that though He was the Creator of men, He yet deigned to live the life of an ordinary man partaking of all our experiences, for :

Thou knowest,—not alone as GOD all-knowing,
As MAN our mortal weakness Thou hast proved :
On earth, with purest sympathies o'erflowing,
O Saviour, Thou hast wept and Thou hast loved ;
And love and sorrow still to Thee may come
To find a hiding-place, a rest, a home.

Hymnal Companion (2nd Ed.), No. 460.

PRAYER

My God, I heartily thank Thee for all Thy goodness to my body and my soul. I want Thy guidance and direction in all I do. Let Thy wisdom counsel me, Thy hand lead me, and Thine arm support me. I put myself into Thy hands. Breathe into my soul holy and heavenly desires. Conform me to Thine own image. Make me like my Saviour. Enable me in some measure to live here on earth as He lived, and to act in all things as He would have acted. *Amen.*—(ASHTON DRENDEN.)

V

CHRIST—THE GIVER OF NEW LIFE

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, *even* to them that believe on his name : Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.—ST. JOHN I. 12, 13.

THE story of our Lord's public life is a record of many rejections of Himself and His message, but also of some acceptances. St. John therefore, whilst he has to chronicle the rejection of Christ the Light by the bulk of the chosen people, is able to record that all men did not turn away from the Light. Reviewing in outline, as he now is, the history of Christ and His coming to men, he can look back upon many who accepted our Lord and His teaching, and he knows what the acceptance meant for them.

“ His own people ” did not as a body receive Him, but there were some, both Jews and Gentiles, who did receive Him. St. John, with his knowledge of what took place in our Lord's public ministry, can look back and see that there was a continual attraction from among the Jews to our Lord, and the story to be unfolded in the Gospel by him is to show it. He can see the many falling back and only the few remaining (cf. St. John vi.

St. John
i. 12, 13.
The
acceptance
of Christ
by some.

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St. John 66). He sees the Jewish rulers and people denying their long-looked-for Messiah, but he thinks of a small minority accepting Him. He can see, outside the limits of the chosen people, a few others whom Christ had attracted : the Samaritan woman at the well, and some of her countrymen (St. John iv.), the Roman Centurion (St. Luke vii. 1-10), the Syro-Phœnician woman (St. Mark vii. 26), and the inquiring Greeks (St. John xii. 20). He can see outside the pages of the Gospels the influence of the ascended Christ on other non-Jewish people. He can think of the triumphs won through his fellow-Apostle, St. Paul, in Asia Minor and Greece, he can see round about himself in Ephesus evidences of the power of Christ in one of the most corrupt cities of that time. Jews and Gentiles, he can see them now slowly turning to receive Him.

But the great thing upon which St. John's mind also dwells is the result as men turn to "receive Him." To such as "receive Him" Christ "gave power to become the sons of God." The word which is translated "power" has slightly different shades of meaning, and these differences of meaning depend upon the point of view with which one is looking at the word. For example, it may mean "right" or "authority," and in this sense it means that to those who received Him Christ gave the "right" or the "authority" to become the sons of God. In this sense of the word, one is looking at the Giver, *i.e.* at Christ. But it may also mean "capacity" or "competency," and implies that those who "receive Christ" are endowed

Christ—The Giver of New Life

in a new way. This meaning, therefore, looks not so much at Christ the Giver, but at man the recipient. The meaning of the word is thus twofold at least. Man was created in the image of God, the heavenly aspirations may always have remained in some way or other, but the power for realising them had gone. So our Lord came not only to give man the "right" or "authority" to reclaim his original kinship with God, but He came also to infuse into man a new spirit, and by the aid of Christ and of His Spirit man acquired the "capacity" or the "competency" to realise his former relationship with God. Thus the truth behind the word is a very comprehensive one. It emphasises the fact that the eternal life of man is first and foremost a gift from God, it also reminds us that man is newly endowed to play his part in realising the gift.

This latter truth, moreover, is brought out further by the remaining words of verse 12, *i.e.* "even to them that believe on His Name." Like so many words and expressions in the first verses of St. John's Gospel, this phrase summarises what in effect the whole purpose of the Gospel is to demonstrate. "Eternal life and how to obtain it" is the theme of St. John's writing (St. John xx. 31), and it would be equally true to say that the Gospel is also a demonstration of what is meant by "believing on His Name." St. John will give his own illustrations of his meaning as we read his narrative, but here he is again stating by way of a preface what the Gospel will show in detail. He is thinking of the men who have received Christ as the incarnate

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St. John i. 12, 13. **Belief in Christ not merely intellectual.** son of God. He thinks of himself and of his fellow-Christians who have been attracted to Christ, and he knows what their belief has meant. It does not mean merely some sort of mental assent to the fact that Christ was the long-looked-for Messiah, nor does it mean a mere mental assent to the divine sonship of Christ. "Receiving" Him and "believing on His name" did imply this, and, moreover, it was no doubt the point from which they started. But it implied a good deal more than this. "To believe on" implies far more than mere thought. St. John uses this expression several times in his Gospel (cf. ii. 23, v. 24, viii. 30), and the different instances are worth noting. The root idea underlying the words, however, is trust arising from an assured truth; it carries with it the idea that we surrender ourselves completely to the One in Whom we believe. "To believe on" Christ therefore means to St. John the complete surrender of the one who believes to Christ.

Complete surrender. The underlying truth is further emphasised by bearing in mind what is meant by belief "on His Name." It is evident that what St. John refers to here is not merely belief in a title. It would not necessarily make much difference to the Jews if they had had a belief in the title of Christ the Messiah. It might possibly have affected their position in Palestine if they had staked their all on the political issue which they thought was involved in the Messiahship of Christ, but this would not have affected their spiritual life, nor their life in the world to come.

Christ—The Giver of New Life

St. John, however, is referring to the nature and **St. John** being of Christ, and not merely to a name or title. **i. 12, 13.** He sees that Christ is God in human flesh, he realises that whatever he knows of the omnipotent God he knows it because he has seen the Omnipotent God in the Person of Jesus Christ. Therefore, whatever attitude he adopts towards Christ, he adopts towards the immortal and eternal God, and because he "believes on the Name of Christ" he surrenders himself in trust to Christ, he gives himself to the eternal Father revealed in and by Jesus Christ.

Moreover, it is because of this surrender of himself **Verse 13.** to Christ, that a man enters into the family of "spiritual sons of God." Again, this is a truth the importance of which is examined in detail in the Gospel (cf. St. John iii.), but the fact is summarised here to complete the truth which the Prologue is summing up. Christ's whole intention in coming to His world was to win men back to God's original purpose for them. As men therefore "receive" Christ, and "believe on His Name," they are "born again," or "begotten again," of God. This results in a different kind of life to that lived before, it gives the believer in Christ a life which has its origin in God, which is controlled by God, and which is being continually renewed by God.

It is also a life fundamentally different to the ordinary life of mankind, and a life which is absolutely unattainable by mankind itself. St. John makes this fact very clear when he says that the spiritual sons of God are born not of "blood." The Greek word is plural, *i.e.* "bloods," and by the

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St. John i. 12, 13. use of the plural he refers to the ordinary human generation of species. But "sons of God" are not born of "bloods," they are not born in the same way as those born of human parents. Nor, again, are they born "of the will of the flesh," the ordinary instincts of mankind are not sufficient of themselves to enable men to attain to the standard of being "sons of God." Nor, moreover, are they born "of the will of man." Men may be honest in their searchings after God, they may be sincere in their attempts to know God and to serve Him, but even this has never brought the realisation of sonship. In only one way does the sonship come, and that is from God Himself. As we "receive" Christ and "believe on His Name," as we give ourselves to Him, then we are "begotten of God," we become "children of God."

PRAYER

Infinite and Holy One, Whom we know as our Father and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, we devoutly thank Thee for the mercy that created us from the dust, and for the greater mercy that has created us anew by a heavenly adoption as Thy children. For the undying yearnings, which Thou hast implanted in us, after things unseen,—for their satisfaction in Thyself, we thank Thee; and we rejoice that Thou hast been willing to encourage our frail and mortal spirits, by revealing to us something of the perfections of Thy nature, and calling us to follow after Thee. Grant, we pray, that Thy loving-kindness may be followed by our obedience. And do Thou so confirm our best purposes by renewing our sense of Thy presence, that we may both imitate Thy nature, and accept Thy dealings with us in the spirit of childlike trust, and by the help of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*—(HENRY W. FOOTE.)

VI

CHRIST—THE WORD MADE FLESH

And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me. And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.—ST. JOHN I. 14-18.

IT might seem that St. John had already emphasised St. John with sufficient force the fact that Christ had come i. 14-18. into the world to live as man and also that the incarnate son of God had, by His earthly life and teaching, shown men how they could live the true life for which they were originally created. The statements in verses 11 and 12 at least would make this truth clear to us. But though the truth may be clear to us who read the statements with the full knowledge of what the words imply, yet St. John wishes to place beyond the shadow of The contradiction the truth that the eternal Christ came Incarnation. into the world to live the life of an ordinary human being. This is implied in all that St. John has stated in the first thirteen verses, but the explicit

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St. John i. 14-18. statement comes now, viz. "the Word became flesh."

The reason for the emphasis which St. John places upon this statement can be gathered from the assertion in his Epistle that "Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God ; And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God . . ." (1 John iv. 23). It is evident from these words that there were people known to St. John who denied that Christ had come as man, and that He had lived the life of ordinary men. Whatever view they may have held about Christ, they did not believe that His life was such that ordinary people live.

Practical bearing of Christ's humanity.

Now, if their idea was true, we can see what a difference it would make to us who look to Christ for help and guidance. For example, we offer our prayers to Him in times of temptation because we are told, "He was tempted in all points like as we are . . .," and we pray, therefore, feeling that He knows and can appreciate our temptations, and that He will lend a sympathetic ear because He Himself experienced temptations of a similar kind.

Or we throw ourselves upon Him in our hours of trouble and anxiety, because we know that He had human relationships in the home of Nazareth, and that He had human friendships such as that with His friends at Bethany. Because of these earthly relationships and friendships we know that He had experiences which are inseparable from these conditions. We can read, for instance, of the disappoint-

Christ—The Word made Flesh

ments He had from those nearest related to Him **St. John** (cf. **St. John** vii. 5), or we can see how His heart **i. 14-18.** was stricken at the loss of His friend Lazarus (**St. John** xi. 35, 36). As we read of these and of other such experiences, we feel that He can touch our stricken and troubled hearts with the healing and comforting hand of One Who has Himself known our experiences.

Or we look to Him as the Guide for our earthly life, we see in Him all that makes for the "highest and holiest manhood," and we find in Him the noblest Pattern for the whole human race. And seeing all this we try to follow Him because as true man, in an ordinary body like our own, He showed us the way to live the perfect life.

But if Christ was not truly man, if He did not live the ordinary life of men, if He had not His hours of pain and disappointment, and if He had not had difficulties about His life's work, then He could not have been the true and complete Saviour of men. If the conditions of His life were not similar to our own, then we could not be sure of a complete understanding between Him and ourselves. If there was no shadow in His life but only the sunlight, then also there would be little likeness between His life and ours. There could not be a complete drawing together when the experiences of life were so dissimilar.

St. John therefore wishes to place this fact beyond question. Christ the Word of God was "made flesh." Jesus Christ the Son of God "came in the flesh." It is the vital importance of this

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St. John i. 14-18. truth which makes St. Paul declare that "God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16), and in Phil. ii. 6-8 he tells us how our Lord laid aside His "mode of divine existence" in order to enter upon an existence which is lived by ordinary mortals. It will always remain a mystery how our Lord in His earthly life remained both God and Man, and how the human and divine natures were united in Him. But what St. John is here emphasising, and what we ourselves must always remember, is, that our Lord's humanity was real and complete, and that if He was "very God of very God" He was also "very man of the substance of the Virgin Mary."

"Tabernacled among us."

Yet though He was "very man," St. John can never draw away from the wonder that it was God Himself Who became man. The translation of both the authorised and revised versions fails to bring out a shade of meaning which the Greek text makes more apparent. The ordinary translation runs, "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us," but the word "dwelt" should be literally "tabernacled." Such a word brings home to us the idea which was in St. John's mind. He is thinking of the contrast between the way in which God had revealed Himself in days gone by, and the way in which God revealed Himself in our Lord Jesus Christ. God's command to Moses had been, "Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exod. xxv. 8), and the Levitical law contained the promise that "I will set My tabernacle among you. . . ." In the Tabernacle the Israelites felt and realised the nearer Presence

Christ—The Word made Flesh

of God, and they understood the truth of God's **St. John** message to David, "I have walked in a tent and in **i. 14-18.** a tabernacle" (2 Sam. vii. 6). God's "tabernacled Presence" in the tent of meeting was a divinely appointed means by which He drew near to His chosen people.

But now His "tabernacled Presence" is no longer felt and realised in a tent, His Presence is "tabernacled" in a living Person. The marvel of the contrast comes home to St. John as he thinks of the difference between the old and the new, the tent with the concealed Presence replaced by the living Person.

We feel this element of wonder in St. John also **The glory** as we ponder over his next words, "we beheld His **seen in** glory," because they are full of suggestions of the **Christ.** method by which God had revealed Himself to the children of Israel in days gone by. When God drew near to the children of Israel in the wilderness we are told that "the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud" (Exod. xvi. 10). When He drew near to Moses in the mountain we read that "the glory of the Lord appeared upon Mount Sinai" (Exod. xxiv. 16). Later on in the history of the Israelites when the Temple of Solomon had been built, and the feast of the dedication of the Temple was in progress, we are told that "the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord" (1 Kings viii. 11), just as later still the vision which Isaiah had in the Temple gave him a glimpse of the truth that "the whole earth is full of His glory" (Isa. vi. 3). That glory which the Israelites saw and felt in those

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St. John
i. 14-18. special moments of their history was now brought before them by our Lord. There may have been particular moments, such as that on the Mount of Transfiguration, when the glory of God seemed more apparent than at other times, in the Person of our Lord. St. John, however, realised, just as St. Paul and the rest of the writers of the New Testament did, that they had literally seen "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6), and that our Lord was "the brightness of God's glory and the express image of God's Person" (Heb. i. 3).

Thus the marvel of the Incarnation holds the mind and soul of the Apostle. The eternal God coming to earth in the likeness of the creature whom He created, the Creator of the universe deigning to submit to the limitations of human existence, the majesty and glory and the love of God being shown to men in a human body—these and many other such things St. John sees as he thinks of his Master. But with the marvel of the Incarnation he never loses sight of its purpose, because he knows that the coming of Christ had a very definite object. "Herein is love," he says, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John iv. 10). He sees "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ," and that glory shines for him with a message of redemptive love. This fact gives him for a moment a feeling of the contrast between the Mosaic dispensation and his own. He thinks again for a moment of the Baptist and his

Christ—The Word made Flesh

testimony as the last of the prophets to the coming **St. John Christ**. He looks back to the Law given by God **i. 14-18.** through Moses, and he thinks of the commands and prohibitions given to his forefathers. He contemplates the spiritual childhood through which the Jews had passed under the developing guidance of the great law-giver. But now the spiritual childhood is passed, law is replaced by grace, and spiritual sonship is now offered and made realisable by Christ Who sums up in Himself all grace (Eph. ii. 5) and truth (St. John xiv. 6).

So St. John draws his introductory statement to **Verse 18.** a close, and he ends on what is the keynote of the Christian faith, *i.e.* that in Christ men have learned all that is knowable about God. Men may have had glimpses of the fact of God's existence in the days before Christ came. Inspired leaders of men amongst Greeks and Romans, Egyptians and Chinese, and other races, may have had glimmerings of great truths about God. The chosen people of Israel may have had partial unveilings of Jehovah and symbolical visions of His glory (cf. 1 Kings xix. 13). But now Christ has "declared Him" to the world, He has made Him known to men. The "making known" has been performed by Christ the "only-begotten Son," or as other renderings put it, by Christ who is "God only-begotten." Christ, Who is Himself God, has made God known to men.

O Love, how deep, how broad, how high !
It fills the heart with ecstasy,
That God, the Son of God, should take
Our mortal form for mortal's sake.

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St. John
i. 14.—18

He sent no Angel to our race
Of higher or of lower place,
But wore the robe of human frame
Himself, and to this lost world came.
(*Hymns A. and M.*, No. 173.)

PRAYER

For Thy Son, sent forth into the world in the fulness of time to reveal Thy glory: for His life and His example: for His teaching and His love: for His sacrifice on the Cross, and His rising again in power over sin and death: for His ascension to the heavenly places, and for the gift of His Spirit,

We thank Thee, O God.

(*Prayers for Students.*)

VII

THE WITNESS OF THE BAPTIST

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me : for he was before me.

And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou ? And he confessed, and denied not ; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then ? Art thou Elias ? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet ? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou ? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself ? He said, I *am* the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias. And they which were sent were of the Pharisees. And they asked him, and said unto him, Why baptisest thou then, if thou be not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet ? John answered them, saying, I baptise with water : but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not ; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose. These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptising.—ST. JOHN I. 15, 19-28.

THE first eighteen verses of St. John's Gospel are St. John usually referred to as the Prologue, and the title **i. 15**, is so given because the verses sum up the truth **19-28**. which is to be unfolded in detail in the rest of the Gospel. But before the writer of the Gospel begins the actual unfolding of the portions of the life of Christ which he has selected, there are certain

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St. John i. 15, 19-28. important incidents of a preliminary nature which he wishes to put on record, and which are incorporated in verses 19 to 51 of this chapter.

The first of these incidents is the witness of the Baptist about our Lord to the Jewish leaders.

His
denuncia-
tion of sin.

It is evident that the preaching of John the Baptist had exercised an electrifying effect upon the people of Palestine. The accounts given in St. Matthew iii. and St. Luke iii. show that the whole country had been stirred to a remarkable degree. The call to repentance, the denunciation of sins, the fierce uncompromising spirit which refused any accommodation with the sins and foibles of people in every walk of life, all these betokened a spirit which was not that of any ordinary man. There is a type of preacher who seems to attract a large following by mere denunciation, and our own generation has often seen the spectacle of fashionable churches crowded to hear denunciations of the follies and sins of so-called fashionable people. The reason for such an attraction may be difficult to gauge accurately, but part of it may be due to the accusing voice of conscience.

So amongst those who crowded to hear the Baptist many may have been attracted by his stern denunciation of sin because their own consciences pricked them as he turned the searchlight of his eloquence upon their lives.

But mere denunciation and rebuke would by themselves have not effected any lasting good. Men resent continuous reproof, and had the Baptist's preaching been merely of this character it would

The Witness of the Baptist

have failed, and there would have been no movement as there was from "all the country of Judea" (St. Mark i. 5) to be baptised. **St. John i. 15, 19-28.**

There was another side, however, to John's preaching, and this was the proclamation of a coming "kingdom of heaven" in which "the Lord" (St. Matt. iii. 3) should reign. This it was which gripped the minds of men, and made them look forward in hope to the manifestation of God in some way upon the earth. Denunciation of sin will arrest the mind, but the proclamation of the "Kingdom of God" will prepare the mind for hearing the message of God. **His proclamation of the Kingdom**

The appeal of God to the nobler instincts of mankind is never without some response from the generality of men, and it is significant how men always do respond to the voice of God speaking through every true preacher. We can think of John Wycliffe with his appeal to the Bible, and we know how England in the dark and corrupt times of Wycliffe's day turned eagerly to the man who enabled them to hear the voice of God speaking through the pages of Holy Writ. Or we can think of Wesley in the decadent days of the eighteenth century, and we know how England turned with eagerness to the man who showed them something of the love of God in the redemption of man. Wycliffe and Wesley are but two names out of many which show that when the voice of God speaks through a prophet the consciences of men recognise the voice and their hearts are stirred to respond. So it was that when the Baptist denounced

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St. John the sin of men, and proclaimed the coming Kingdom
i. 15, of heaven, men recognised the voice of God, and
19-28. publicans and soldiers, Pharisees and Sadducees crowded to him to learn what they must do.

Verse 15. It was in consequence of the religious upheaval that was taking place through the medium of the Baptist, that the official leaders sent the deputation to find out something about the new preacher. The deputation of "Jerusalem priests and Levites" was despatched by the Pharisees (v. 24) who represented the national and religious hopes of the Jews. The mission, moreover, was sent in no spirit of antagonism, but rather in the longing and expectation which was characteristic of all God-fearing Jews. It represented the stirring of souls who were eagerly looking for the redemption of Israel (cf. Simeon, St. Luke ii. 25), and it was a genuine desire on the part of religious-minded men to see the Messiah for whom the nation had waited so long (v. 20). Whether the Baptist was the Messiah, they could not be certain, but the feeling was obviously strong that the new preacher was Someone not of man but of God. Their thoughts went to Elijah, whose coming was to be associated with the Messiah (cf. St. Matt. xvii. 11), and to the prophet whom Moses predicted should one day be raised up (Deut. xviii. 15). Of the personality of the Baptist they could not feel certain, but they felt that he was a Divine revelation of some kind.

The
inquiry of
the Jewish
leaders.

Now, if these were the thoughts which were stirring the minds of the leaders of the people, it can be the more readily imagined what sort of ideas were

The Witness of the Baptist

thrilling the multitudes who crowded to be baptised by John. Their ready obedience to his stern denunciations, and the manner in which the various classes of people such as publicans, soldiers on the march, Pharisees and Sadducees came to him for guidance in their lives (cf. St. Luke iii. 10-14), are sufficiently indicative of the exalted position which the people had mentally given him. The deputation which came from Jerusalem therefore with its pertinent inquiries, was simply the climax which showed how the Jewish nation was thrilled with expectation at the messages of the desert preacher, and in particular that the Baptist was regarded with the greatest veneration.

It can be readily seen that the interest which the Baptist had aroused carried with it a possible snare for himself. He was a herald of the coming King, and that he should be mistaken for the King Himself might have worked havoc with a man of lesser calibre. There was every possibility for arrogance and self-aggrandisement in the adulation which was bestowed upon him.

St. John
i. 15,
19-28.

The
preacher's
danger.

The same danger has also beset the accredited teachers and preachers of the Christian Church. In one sense their position is akin to that of the Baptist in that they are set apart to be heralds of the coming King. But just as the importance of the Baptist's position made it possible for him to be mistaken for the King Himself, so it is with many Christian teachers to-day. It is true that people are not likely to fall into the error of mistaking a popular preacher for their Lord and Master;

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St. John
i. 15,
19-28.

the danger is more subtle than that. What so many Christian people do is to depend entirely upon a certain preacher for their view of Christ, forgetting that it is their privilege to go direct to their Master and to learn in His Presence the lessons He would teach them.

Teachers and preachers may help us, but their work is faulty if it leaves us depending upon them, and does not bring us nearer to our Master. And if the work of such accredited heralds is bad for those to whom they minister it is equally so for themselves. A ministry which begins in faithful preaching of Christ, which wins popular favour in so far that crowds hang on the lips of the preacher, has a danger unless the preacher remains in prayerful communion with his Master. It is one of the greatest privileges in this world to be enabled to point men to Him Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and it is one of the most heartening experiences to be the means in God's hand of turning men from darkness to light. But only the most faithful dependence upon Christ can keep such a favoured minister true to his office as a herald, and prevent him arrogating to himself the praise due to the King Whom he proclaims.

The Baptist, however, was not entrapped by the snare of popularity and success, and his self-explanation to the inquiries of the messengers from Jerusalem was not abasement, but simply the faithful witness of a herald who knew himself to be but the voice of his Master. So he declares emphatically, "I am not the Christ" (v. 20); he

The Witness of the Baptist

allows no ambiguity to remain on that important point. He declares, moreover, that he is not Elijah. There is no contradiction between this assertion and that in St. Matt. xi. 14 or St. Matt. xvii. 12, where our Lord refers to John as Elijah. In these last two passages our Lord was speaking figuratively when He referred to the Baptist as Elijah, but when John himself was giving his testimony about himself he was simply asserting that he was not the prophet Elijah come again to earth. Nor, moreover, would he allow that he was the prophet (v. 21) referred to in Deut. xviii. 15, one whom the Jews thought might be even the Messiah himself. Before he gives any explanation of himself, he is careful and explicit in removing any ambiguities which would raise any misconceptions about himself and his work.

When he comes to define his true position, the Baptist makes very clear the office and work which he had been called to perform. He describes himself first of all as the Forerunner, of whom Esaias had prophesied (v. 23), but a forerunner of a Greater still to come (v. 26), Whose greatness was such that he would be unworthy to perform for Him even the slave's task of unloosing His sandal (v. 27). John's explanation still seemed incomplete to the messengers. They had seen him engaged in the work of baptising people in the Jordan, and the act of baptising had been associated with the promised Messiah (cf. Isa. lii. 2; Ezek. xxxvi. 25; Zech. xiii. 1). Therefore it seemed to the messengers that they were right in associating the Baptist with

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St. John
i. 15,
19-28.

the Messianic promises of the Old Testament (v. 25). So again John makes it clear that if he baptised with water unto repentance, the One to Whom he was bearing witness would baptise with the Holy Ghost (St. Matt. iii. 11). His own position in baptising was simply the ordinary Jewish one, which used Baptism as the symbolic act of cleansing. The Baptism by the One coming after him was to be a Baptism into a new life by means of the Holy Spirit. Thus the witness of the Baptist is ever clear and direct. It is always the exaltation of his Master, it is unvaryingly the witness of the herald to his King.

These verses therefore suggest at least three things. In the first place they show us how in this introductory part of the Gospel the Apostle St. John makes clear and distinct the essential difference between the Baptist and our Lord. The Baptist was undoubtedly a great man, and the influence which he exercised among all grades of society from Herod downwards, is a testimony to the greatness of John. But when everything has been said that can be said for the Baptist, the vital distinction between him and Christ remains (cf. i. 6, 7, 15 ; iii. 28-30).

A reliable
witness.

Then these verses show us the reliability of the witness of the Baptist to Christ. There is no faltering in the tone of John as he bears his testimony to the One Who is to overshadow his own great influence. It is very significant how our

The Witness of the Baptist

Lord on the eve of His Ascension commissioned **St. John** His disciples with the words, "Ye shall be My **i. 15,** witnesses" (Acts i. 8, R.V.), for the whole essence **19-28.** of Christian discipleship is to be a witness to Christ. But here, before the public ministry of Christ begins, we have an illustration of true witness to our Lord, the reliable testimony of the Baptist to his Master.

Moreover, the incident reminds us that Christ must ever come first, and not the witness. A witness who forgets his office, runs the danger of hiding, and not revealing, the Master to Whom he is commissioned to witness. It is Christ to Whom we bear testimony and not to ourselves, and it is required of witnesses that our Master should always have the pre-eminence, and that nothing by word or deed of ours should detract from the honour due to Him who has called us to His service.

PRAYER

Almighty God, by Whose providence Thy servant John Baptist was wonderfully born, and sent to prepare the way of Thy Son our Saviour, by preaching of repentance: Make us so to follow his doctrine and holy life, that we may truly repent according to his preaching: and after his example constantly speak the truth, boldly rebuke vice, and patiently suffer for the truth's sake: through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*—(*Book of Common Prayer.*)

VIII

JOHN THE BAPTIST'S CON- FESSION OF CHRIST

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me : for he was before me. And I knew him not : but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptising with water. And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not : but he that sent me to baptise with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God.—ST. JOHN I. 29–34.

St. John i. 29–34. THE interview of John with the delegates of the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem would have raised great expectations in the minds of the disciples of the Baptist. They must have had feelings of wonder at what they would regard as the self-depreciation of their leader who had stirred Palestine to such a remarkable degree ; but they must also have had kindled in them great feelings of expectation with regard to the One to Whom John had referred.

Just about this time our Lord had gone through the experience of the Temptation, when He encountered the suggestions that He should prove the Saviour of man by the methods of the world

John's Confession of Christ

rather than by the methods of God. Probably as **St. John** He was returning to His home, with the exaltation **i. 29-34.** of His experience in the wilderness reflected in His **The meet-** countenance, He encountered the Baptist. **ing of**

Our Lord and John were no doubt intimately **Christ and** acquainted with each other, since they were related **John the** by birth. John's statements ("I knew Him not") **Baptist.**

in verses 31, 33, do not mean that he was unacquainted with Christ. As relatives, they must often have come in touch with each other, and they would obviously unfold their thoughts to one another. No doubt, both in youth and young manhood, the Baptist realised that a gulf separated Christ from himself. His remark in St. Matt. iii. 14, "I have need to be baptised of Thee, and comest Thou to me?" shows that John had already in the earlier days of their young friendship grasped his own unworthiness in comparison with our Lord. The Baptist's statement "I knew Him not" means, therefore, that he did not realise everything about Christ; it implied that he did not fully understand the nature or the divinity of our Lord.

Now, however, comes a unique confession from "Behold the lips of John. Whether it was that the experiences of Christ in the wilderness had left their mark on His countenance, just as happened after the experiences of our Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration (cf. St. Mark ix. 15), and that the Baptist by divine inspiration saw what he had never seen before in Christ, we cannot tell. What we see, however, is that as soon as the Baptist recognises our Lord coming towards him he bursts out with the Lamb of God."

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St. John the exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God which
i. 29-34. taketh away the sin of the world."

That a confession of this nature, implying all that it does of the Person and Work of our Lord, should come on the very threshold of the Gospel, seems on reflection a very wonderful thing, and we may well ask how this truth came to the Baptist.

Something was due to his own experiences as a preacher and teacher. He had been the means of rousing his countrymen in a way which had not been witnessed for many years, and he had seen the crowds flocking to him to learn the way to live better lives. But he had discovered his own incapacity to satisfy the needs of men. "I baptise with water," he declared; he was able to kindle men to repent, and he could baptise them with water as a sign that they had repented of their former sins. Yet he could not empower them to live new lives. He could turn them from darkness to light, but he was unable to give them the strength to enable them to enter on the inheritance of those who are sanctified by faith that is in Christ (cf. Acts xxvi. 18). In his own failure he turned from himself, and saw in Christ Him Who "baptiseth with the Holy Ghost" (v. 33), and Who could give men the power to live new lives.

Moreover, the Baptist's own witness to himself as the Forerunner of the Messiah was based upon the prophecies of Isaiah (v. 23), and the same prophet had foretold the coming of a suffering Messiah (Isa. liii). It was a prophecy which was evidently very much in the minds of the Jews. We can

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think of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian **St. John Eunuch**, and we know how Philip unhesitatingly **i. 29-34.** applied Isa. liii. to our Lord (Acts viii. 35). Or we can read St. Peter's statement that "ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold . . . but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Pet. i. 18, 19), and we can again see the influence of Isaiah's prophecy. The Baptist's own incapacity to take away sin and to give men the new life which they sought, caused him, therefore, to take up the well-known prophecy and to apply it to our Lord Whose work it most fittingly summarised.

The Baptist's thoughts would also very naturally be influenced by the Paschal Lamb of the Passover Feast, with all its redemptive significance for the children of Israel. But in whatever direction we may look for the influences which, under God, were helping John to the realisation of our Lord's Person and Work, this striking fact remains, that in the very forefront of his confession is the fact of the atoning death of Christ.

The significance of this confession is all the greater **An epoch-making confession.** when we notice that the Baptist regards our Lord's death as available to take away the sin of the world, and not merely the sin of the Jews. It is a matter for much astonishment that John could thus step out of the narrow view which was held even later by many of the Apostles. It was only after much heart-searching that St. Peter and other leaders of the Christian Church reached the truth that the Gospel was for the whole world, and not merely for

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St. John the Jews. Yet here on the eve of our Lord's work,
i. 29-34. the Baptist is able to say that Christ is come to be the Lamb of God Who shall take away the sin of the whole world, and so to enable the whole race of men to live in newness of life by God's help. The Baptist's statement therefore is from every point of view one of the most striking and epoch-making statements that could have been made at this stage with reference to the Person and Work of Christ. There are thus two points of importance with regard to John's confession which are worthy of the deepest consideration.

The re-
demptive
work of
Christ.

First of all it must grip the attention of every reader that the Baptist in his confession should place first and foremost the redemptive work of Christ. The Prologue had given details about the eternal character of the Person of Christ, and of His Divinity and essential oneness with God. Now, however, when He is actually introduced to the world of men through the lips of the Baptist, He is revealed and made known as the Redeemer.

In this, however, we see something which is in accordance with our own spiritual experience. We may long to know God, and our desires may be as pure as the Psalmists when he said, "as the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God" (Ps. xlii. 1). But the way to the knowledge of God is through the Atonement. When the burden of sin has been carried away by the Cross (cf. 1 Pet. ii. 24), and when the barrier of sin has been broken down by our acceptance of

John's Confession of Christ

Christ's redeeming death, then the way to the **St. John** knowledge of God lies open. We can know God **i. 29-34.** through Christ our Redeemer.

Moreover, the fact that St. John, the writer of the Gospel, has placed this particular confession of the Baptist at this point shows something of the place which the Atonement occupied in the mind of the Apostle. Too often people have been so struck with the mystical side of St. John's teaching both in his Gospel and Epistle, that they have overlooked the emphasis which he lays upon the redemptive work of Christ. But when St. John placed this confession of the Baptist as the description which introduced Christ to the world, it showed that the Apostle after his own teaching by our Lord, and after a life experience of the truth of it, wished to corroborate the great truth which the Baptist by divine insight or inspiration had seen, viz. that Jesus Christ's mission was to be the Saviour and Redeemer of men.

This, however, leads us to examine a little further **The** how it was possible that the Baptist's confession of **Baptist's** Christ as the Redeemer, could have been made **proclama-** before our Lord had actually begun His public **tion guided** ministry. Something must be allowed for the **by the** possibility that Christ and John may have dis- **Holy Spirit.** cussed the character of the mission which the Messiah was to undertake. Any such suggestions are, of course, only conjectural, since there is no evidence in the Gospel to support them. What the Gospel does tell us, however, is that the Baptist's confession was made through the guidance of the

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St. John i. 29-34. Holy Spirit. In verse 33 John declares that the Spirit of God had told him that "Upon Whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost." In the previous verse John also declares, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon Him." It was this fact which made John's views clear about our Lord. Prior to this manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, John could say, "I knew Him not" (v. 31); he was ignorant of the fact that Jesus was the long-expected Messiah. But now his eyes were opened. The Spirit of God had guided John in his work of baptising unto repentance, as he himself says (v. 23), and so also the same Spirit guided John in proclaiming Christ as the One through Whom men would be baptised with the Holy Spirit (v. 33). The Baptist himself had called men from darkness to light, and now Christ in His character as Redeemer was to give men new life through the power of the Holy Spirit, and so enable them to become the sons of God. It was the Holy Spirit, therefore, Who guided John in his confession of Christ, just as the Holy Spirit would be at work to complete and bring to fruition the work which Christ Himself was about to do.

"The Son of God."

There is yet one important point to be noticed in the Baptist's confession of Christ. By the aid of the Holy Spirit he had recognised in our Lord the Saviour of men, and by the aid of the same Spirit he declares at the end of his confession, "This is the Son of God" (v. 34).

John's Confession of Christ

Now, it may well be asked whether John really **St. John** understood what we would mean when he applied **i. 29-34.** the term "the Son of God" to our Lord. To many people it seems impossible that the Baptist could thus early have grasped the truth of the divinity of our Lord before Christ had actually entered on His public ministry. Consequently some commentators would say that the Baptist used the expression in a somewhat conventional sense, just as the Psalmist does when he says: "I have said, Ye are gods: and all of you are children of the most High" (Ps. lxxxii. 6).

A little reflection, however, will make us feel that such an interpretation is quite inadequate. If Christ was "the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (v. 29), then He was not man but God, for only God can remove the burden and guilt of sin. If, moreover, Christ was "He which baptiseth with the Holy Ghost" (v. 33), then also He was not man but God, for no one else but God could baptise with the Holy Spirit. When, therefore, John pointed to our Lord as the Lamb of God Who was to redeem men, and as the One Who should baptise with the Holy Ghost, and when he went on to declare that Christ was the Son of God, the last statement was the logical climax of the other two. He Who redeems and gives new life by the Holy Spirit can be none other than the Son of God.

It is quite true that the term "Son of God" would not include for the Baptist all that it did for Thomas and the rest of the disciples later (cf. xx. 28). Only very slowly did the minds of the disciples

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St. John move towards this profound truth. But when like
i. 29-34 Thomas they could say, "My Lord and my God," the title would mean far more to them than it could have meant for the Baptist, who had not had the advantage of hearing from Christ the teaching about His divinity.

So a child may believe that Jesus is God, but it means much more when said by an adult. An untutored man may say that Jesus is God, but it implies a good deal more when it is said by a man who has sounded the depths of philosophy. The later confession of the disciples in the divinity of our Lord, therefore, would have meant more, or involved more, than was contained in the confession of the Baptist. But the marvel is that here in the very first introduction of Christ to the world, that introduction is made, by the power of the Holy Spirit, in terms which mean everything for us men and our salvation. He is introduced to us as the Son of God Who redeems us and Who bestows on us new life.

The whole incident suggests a very pertinent question to every reader. It invites us to consider whether we have in the forefront of our knowledge of Christ the fact that He is our Redeemer. It compels us to ask ourselves whether we look to Him simply as an example of Perfect Manhood or merely as the Revealer of God. Whatever conception we may have of Him, we have not the real truth unless He is first and foremost our Saviour and Redeemer.

John's Confession of Christ

Behold the Lamb of God !
O Thou for sinners slain,
Let it not be in vain
That Thou hast died :
Thee for my Saviour let me take,
My only refuge let me make
Thy piercèd side.

St. John
i. 29-34.

Behold the Lamb of God !
Into the sacred flood
Of Thy most precious Blood
My soul I cast :
Wash me and make me clean within,
And keep me pure from every sin,
Till life be past.

Behold the Lamb of God !
All hail, Incarnate Word,
Thou everlasting Lord,
Saviour most Blest :
Fill us with love that never faints,
Grant us with all Thy blessèd Saints
Eternal rest.

(Hymns A. and M., No. 187.)

IX

THE BAPTIST'S INTRODUCTION OF HIS TWO DISCIPLES TO CHRIST

Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples ; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God ! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye ? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master), where dwellest thou ? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day : for it was about the tenth hour.—ST. JOHN I. 35-39.

St. John i. 35-39. THE Baptist's confession of Christ, with all the significance which the confession involved, must have made a great impression upon those who heard it. His cry, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," must have transfixed the attention of his hearers. Their knowledge of the Old Testament would at once have given them a clue to the significance of Christ. But when the Baptist went on to declare that Christ was the One Who would baptise with the Holy Spirit of God, and that He was the Son of God, then we can imagine something of what it

Introduction of Two Disciples

meant for them. As disciples of the Baptist they **St. John** had been taught continuously about the coming **i. 35-39.** Christ and the coming Kingdom of God on earth, and when their teacher pointed them to Jesus of Nazareth as the One in Whom all his teaching was summed up, we can readily imagine how they were keyed up to the highest expectation.

It was while they were in this state of expectancy about what was to happen, now that the long-expected One had appeared, that the Baptist and two of his disciples again met Christ. One of the two disciples was Andrew, as we can see from verse 40. The name of the other is not mentioned, but it was probably the Apostle St. John. St. John, as the author of the Gospel, would have given the name had the second disciple not been himself, but following his usual custom he does not name himself, but allows us to infer his presence. No doubt Andrew and John were talking with the Baptist about his words of the previous day, and of all that was involved in the great confession he had made, and as they were thus in conversation together Christ came in sight.

We can picture to ourselves something of the keenness with which the two disciples were looking forward to seeing Christ again. They had had time to ponder over the extraordinary statements made by the Baptist concerning Him, and as Christ approached they would naturally be full of the greatest expectation. As Christ came near, we are **The** told that the Baptist "looked on Jesus as He **Baptist's** walked." This translation, however, fails to bring **penetrating** look.

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St. John out that it was no mere casual glance which a man
i. 35-39. might give to a passing stranger. The Greek word implied that the Baptist gave a keen penetrating glance at our Lord, just as Christ did at Peter, as described in verse 42. It was the searching look of a man whose whole soul was in his eyes, if we may be permitted the expression. It was the look of a man who was waiting for his Lord, the look of the herald who was waiting for his King, the look of the Forerunner who was waiting the One Who was to complete the work he had begun. And as he looked, he saw again what the Spirit of God had previously shown him, he saw in Jesus the fulfilment of all his own preaching; and once more he declared, "Behold the Lamb of God."

Now, the Baptist's declaration was not simply a description of Christ, as on the previous day, nor was it merely the recapitulation of a truth. The two disciples would not need reminding of the character and attributes of Christ, since what their teacher had said the day before was undoubtedly imprinted on their minds. John's declaration was rather the introduction of the two disciples to the personal notice of our Lord, or if it was not that, it was a plain intimation to the two disciples to look upon Christ and to see in Him the consummation of all their hopes, as well as the fulfilment of the Baptist's own teaching.

The significance of the terms of the introduction of the two disciples to Christ should not be overlooked, for it is to "the Lamb of God" they are introduced. The very first words of the Baptist's

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own confession of Christ the day before had been **St. John**
to proclaim Him as "the Lamb of God, which **i. 35-39.**
taketh away the sin of the world." Now, when he **Christ as**
introduces his two disciples to Christ, he does so **the**
in the same terms; he points them to Christ as the **Redeemer.**
Redeemer of men. Such prominence is well worth
serious consideration. The Apostle **St. John** in
the introductory verses of the Gospel dealt with
the Godhead of Christ; he spoke of His Eternal
Being, and how that He is the Light which lighteth
all men who are born into the world. But when
St. John comes to the actual introduction of the
Eternal Christ to men, he introduces Him through
the Baptist as the Redeemer. And when the
Baptist would introduce Christ to his two disciples,
he does so in the same terms, as the Redeemer of
mankind. It fixes for ever the character of our
Lord and Master, for we know Him first and fore-
most as our Saviour and Redeemer.

It is therefore to Christ the Saviour and Redeemer **Verse 37.**
of men that the two disciples now turn. It was not
necessarily impulsiveness which made Andrew and
John immediately follow our Lord, even before
the latter had spoken to them or even looked at
them. It was the natural outcome of all that the
Baptist had been doing. His teaching had all been
directed to the One Who should come, and the day
before he had identified Christ in terms which were
of God and not of man. When now he points
his two disciples to Christ, the Lamb of God, the
disciples follow quite naturally where their old
teacher directed. He had been training them

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St. John for this moment, and so now "they followed
i. 35-39. Jesus."

Superficially, it may seem a little tragic that they should leave their old teacher so readily. The Baptist's work, however, was inevitably preparatory for the two disciples, as it was for every one else. He was the link between the old and the new, and whatever feelings the Baptist may have had are summed up in the recognition that when his Master comes he must recede into the background. He is the friend of the Bridegroom rejoicing in the joy of his Friend, but he knows that as his Friend and Master increases, he must decrease in importance (cf. iii. 29, 30). He has paved the way for the coming King, and he rejoices when his followers walk along the way he has prepared to meet their King and Saviour.

**Verses 38,
39.**

Though the two disciples followed Christ so readily after the Baptist's introduction, yet their minds do not seem very clear either concerning our Lord's Person or about their own intention in following Him. It was evidently one of those God-directed actions which men do instinctively, feeling it is right and yet not being able to give a clear and reasoned answer why they do it. So our Lord turns to them as they follow Him, and asks, "What seek ye?" The form of the question seems strange. We should have expected, in view of the Baptist's introduction, that our Lord would have asked, "WHOM seek ye?" and thus have obtained some sort of confession from them with regard to Himself. But He simply asks, "What seek ye? What is your

"What is
your
purpose?"

Introduction of Two Disciples

purpose in leaving the Baptist and following Me?" St. John Our Lord may possibly have put the question in i. 35-39. order to reassure the disciples and to put them at their ease. Their thoughts would have been strangely excited now that they were in the very Presence of the One Whose advent the Baptist had spent his ministry in proclaiming. Their very answer, "Where dwellest Thou?" to Christ's question seems a lame one, but it indicates something of the sort of bathos which most men feel when they give vent to the commonplace at moments of very high tension. At all events it was quite obvious that the two men desired further intercourse with Christ. They were naturally very full of what they had heard from the Baptist; they could not but be filled with the highest expectations about Christ since they had heard Him described as the Lamb of God, One Who would baptise with the Holy Spirit, and One Who was the Son of God. They are so full of thought that they cannot express their ideas in words, and to their lame queries, Christ says, "Come, and ye shall see" (R.V.).

Our Lord's attitude to these two disciples is simply typical of His whole attitude to seeking humanity. Men to-day are ever hearing of Christ; they learn of His love for man, His work of redemption, and His offers to help. They know their own needs, and they are just as incapable sometimes of expressing their true feelings as those two halting disciples of the Baptist when they stood before Christ. And Christ says to each of us to-day, as He said to the first two men who approached Him, "Come," put

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St. John i. 35-39. your faith in Me to the test, act upon what you have heard about Me, "and you shall see." You will find by experience whether I am all that you need, and whether I can satisfy all your soul's desires.

**The day
spent with
Christ.**

Andrew and John accepted our Lord's invitation and spent the rest of the day with Him. St. John mentions that it was about the tenth hour of the day when they accepted Christ's invitation, but it is somewhat uncertain whether this means 10 o'clock in the morning, *i.e.* reckoning the hours as we do to-day from midnight to midnight, or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, *i.e.* reckoning the hours from sunset to sunset in accordance with the Jewish method. More probably it means 10 o'clock in the morning, for this would allow the necessary time for the interview, and for the other events which took place on the same day. Of any record of the interview there is none; whatever passed between our Lord and the two disciples we do not know. That the time was passed in much eager questioning on the part of Andrew and John we may well gather, and that the intercourse was in every way satisfactory we can tell by the result. What we can see, however, is that this first encounter of the Apostle St. John with our Lord remains vivid in his memory, even when he is writing, towards the end of his long life. The look of Jesus, His words, the hour of the day—these and such-like things have never faded from his memory. Above all he knows what the interview taught him. In the Presence of Christ he learned that Jesus of Nazareth was no ordinary

Introduction of Two Disciples

man. Looking back to the interview he can remember that our Lord's words made him realise His greatness. Prior to the interview he had greeted Christ as Rabbi or Teacher. Whatever anticipations the Baptist's introductory words may have raised in St. John's mind, his first greeting to Christ was merely the courtesy one of "Teacher." But now as his memory recalls the interview, he remembers that as he came into personal contact with Christ he learned that He was the One for Whom the Jewish race had long been waiting, he could say as a result of that first interview, "We have found the Messias."

St. John
i. 35-39.

There is not, of course, everything in this confession which the disciples were to learn later about the divinity of Christ. But their first interview brought them very near to our Lord, when they acclaimed Him as the long-expected Messiah. For the Messiah meant everything to men who were Jews. He was the one in Whom all God's plans for the Jews and for the whole world were gathered up. He was the one on Whom everything in relation to God and man turned. It was this which was written on the mind of St. John as the result of his first words with Christ; he had at length discovered what the whole Jewish race had long been awaiting. "We have found the Messias."

They find
the
Messiah.

The incident suggests at least two great truths for our consideration. The Baptist introduced his two disciples to our Lord as the Lamb of God, the Redeemer of men, and therefore it is as Saviour and Redeemer that Christ is brought to men's

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St. John notice. This is in accord with the divine message
i. 35-39. given to Joseph, mentioned in St. Matt. i. 21, and with the message of the angel recorded in St. Luke ii. 11. Christ is revealed to the world primarily as a Saviour. It is quite true that there are many things about God for which men always crave knowledge, and concerning many of them our Lord gives us light and guidance. But whatever Christ may do in the way of enlightening us about the mysteries of God, or of life or of death, His primary work is the salvation of men. Know Him first, therefore, as Redeemer, and all else will follow in due course.

The other truth is intimately connected with this. Our Lord invited John and Andrew, those first two halting disciples, to "Come, and ye shall see." So for us the same invitation holds good to-day. He asks us to put Him to the test to-day. "Accept my offers," He says, "have the faith to believe all that I freely offer to you, and you will find by happy experience that I am the Redeemer of men, that the burden of sin can be lifted by Me, and that I can guide your feet into the way of peace." "Come, and ye shall see."

Jesus, I will trust Thee, trust Thee with my soul :
Guilty, lost and helpless, Thou canst make me whole.
There is none in heaven or on earth like Thee :
Thou hast died for sinners—therefore, Lord, for me.

Jesus, I may trust Thee, Name of matchless worth,
Spoken by the angel at Thy wondrous birth :
Written, and for ever, on Thy cross of shame,
Sinners read and worship, trusting in that Name.

Introduction of Two Disciples

Jesus, I do trust Thee, trust without a doubt :
Whosoever cometh, Thou wilt not cast out :
Faithful is Thy promise, precious is Thy blood ;
These my soul's salvation, Thou my Saviour God.
(*Hymnal Companion*, No. 159.)

St. John
i. 35-39.

X

ANDREW—THE FIRST CHRISTIAN WORKER

One of the two which heard John *speak*, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus.—ST. JOHN I. 40-42.

St. John i. 40-42. It is sometimes said that Christianity is above all things a missionary religion, and the statement is true. This is not due, however, merely to such commands as that of our Lord in St. Matt. xxviii. 19, though this in itself is sufficient for Christian people. It is due also to the fact that in Christ there is such satisfaction for human needs, that Christians feel compelled by sheer gratitude to pass on the good news.

But if this is true to-day it is even more true of the first days of Christianity. The Acts of the Apostles shows us the first disciples full of eagerness to tell their fellow-countrymen about our Lord, and they did so because He was the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies, because they found in Him the Messiah, and above all because He satisfied their spiritual needs. And what is written so largely in the Acts of the Apostles appears also

Andrew—First Christian Worker

in the very first page of the Gospel, as we shall now see. **St. John**
i. 40-42.

The two disciples of the Baptist, who first made the acquaintance of our Lord, were Andrew and John. In conversation with Christ they made the discovery that He was the Messiah; they found in Him the One for Whom the Jewish world had been looking, and for Whose service the Baptist had been training them. Now, the Jewish hopes of spiritual and political freedom were centred in the Messiah, and they expected from Him the unfolding of all the ways of God to men. It was not the crude idea of a political saviour from the Romans, though that was part of the feeling of a section of the Jews, but they were looking for a Person who should in some ways determine the destiny of the Jews both with regard to this world and the next.

The two disciples made the momentous discovery that our Lord was the Messiah, and their subsequent actions are significant, and yet just what we would expect. One of the two disciples was Andrew, and we are told that as soon as he had realised that Jesus was the Messiah "he first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." The expression "he first findeth his own brother Simon" probably implies that John also hurried off to convey the news to his brother James, and that equally with Andrew he could not keep the information to himself, but hastened off to tell his brother.

Whether St. John did so or not, the Gospel

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St. John makes it clear that Andrew acted promptly and
i. 40-42. thoroughly, and the action seems quite in accord
The with what we read elsewhere about Andrew. When
promptness the disciples were in difficulties about feeding the
of Andrew. multitude who had followed Christ, it is Andrew who
points to a possible solution in the boy with the
five barley loaves and two small fishes (vi. 9). When
the inquiring Greeks wished to interview our Lord,
and approached Philip on the matter, it is Andrew
who brings about the desired meeting (xii. 23).
He seems to have had a practical straightforward
nature, he was a man who knew his own mind and
was ready to act upon his convictions. So as soon
as he had come into contact with our Lord, and
realised Who He was, he hastens off to his brother
with the news "we have found the Messiah."
Nor was he satisfied with telling him about Christ,
he at once got him to come and see for himself ;
"he brought him to Jesus."

In considering this introduction of Peter to
Christ by Andrew, what we see first of all is that
Andrew's action is primarily a confession that his
hopes and longings have been realised. It is the
natural result which follows to a fervent patriotic
Jew, who has suddenly found all for which he has
been searching. By the very nature of the case
the news must be passed on. To keep it to him-
self is out of the question, and it must be made
known to the one he knows best. So he hastened
to tell his brother and to bring him to Christ.

But does not Andrew's action suggest why Chris-
tians should be equally zealous to-day in passing

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on the good news about their Master? We know **St. John** how He satisfies the deepest longings of our soul, **i. 40-42.** we realise that all our thoughts about God and eternity are met by Him, and we are aware that all our spiritual desires have their satisfaction in Him. He has made the pathway of life in this world clearer to us, and He has given us an assured hope about the life which follows this. Just as naturally as Andrew, therefore, should we reveal to others what Christ has done for us. There is a modesty which fears to be blatant about spiritual things, and there is a modesty which is afraid of cheapening spiritual experiences by publicity. Both of these factors cannot be overlooked. But at the same time, if Christ does mean anything to us, and if He has brought joy into our lives, then it is the veriest ingratitude to Him, and it is an act of spiritual selfishness or of cowardice, if we do not share the good news with others.

Then we can see that the testimony of Andrew **A personal testimony.** about Christ is a personal one, for in the words "we have found" he gave evidence of what he knew by his own intercourse with our Lord. It is the very same when Philip had come into contact with Christ, he at once goes to his brother Nathanael with the same statement as Andrew, "We have found" (v. 45). By sheer force of their own conviction based upon personal knowledge they are able to bring others to Christ. And what we see here in the action of the first disciples of Christ is equally true of the days of the Acts of the Apostles, it is a continual witness on the part of the Apostles to

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St. John
i. 40-42.

what they knew by experience. It is true, of course, both of Andrew as of Nathanael, that their knowledge of our Lord was imperfect. They knew Him as yet only as Messiah. But what they knew, they gave their testimony to, and they were the means of gaining others to follow Him in consequence.

So it is the duty and privilege of Christians to testify to what they actually know of their Master by their own experience. That experience may be limited, but if it is real it will carry conviction to others. No Christian is, of course, asked to be a mere copy of the experiences of another. We each of us have our own life to live, and Christ will be found more than sufficient for every individual life. The great thing is to trust Him to fulfil His promises to each of us individually, and as we trust Him we shall be able to tell others from our own experience what He means to us.

Andrew
both a
home and
foreign
missionary.

Further, we see that Andrew was a "home missionary." He went and found his brother Simon, and brought his brother first of all to Jesus. It was the obvious thing to do. Since Jewish people were continuously seeking the Messiah, and since He was the constant theme of conversation in every home, it was a very natural thing that Andrew should hurry off to tell his brother the good news first. Does not the same thing apply in our Christian life? If our faith in Christ means anything to us, then it is inevitable that we shall let those in our home circle know of Him, and that we shall tell them what He has done for us. But if the influence of our belief in Christ is not felt first of

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all in the home, then there is something at fault. **St. John**
It may be hard sometimes in a home where the **i. 40-42.**
atmosphere is anti-Christian or non-committal,
but our first duty lies there. Many people find it
much easier to be a "foreign missionary" than a
"home missionary," but if Andrew's life be
examined it will be found that he was both. He
was a "foreign missionary" (xii. 20-22), but he
was regarded as such because he was above all
a "home missionary."

Then, again, Andrew's bringing of his brother to **Importance**
Christ emphasises the way in which the Christian **of in-**
Church began. We are apt to think overmuch of **dividual**
such incidents as the conversion of the three thou- **work.**
sand by the preaching of St. Peter on the day of
Pentecost, and to imagine that the early Christian
society was founded by wholesale conversions of
this character. But the very beginning of our
Lord's ministry gives us another idea altogether.
It is Andrew who brings his brother Simon, John
brings his brother James, Philip brings Nathanael.
It is individual bringing individual to Christ. Our
Lord Himself, moreover, showed by His interviews
with such people as Nicodemus (chap. iii.) and the
woman of Samaria (chap. iv.) what He felt of the
importance of speaking with a single person. It was
by individual contact with our Lord that the Christian
society began; it was by individuals bringing in-
dividuals that the Kingdom of Christ on earth came
into being. It is a fact worthy of the most serious
consideration to-day. Too often do Christian people
rely upon missions, and missions only, for bringing

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St. John people to Christ. Missions have their place, and an
i. 40-42. important place, in the work of the Christian Church. But the greatest work is that of bringing individuals to Christ. In some ways it is much more difficult than mission work, but in the long run it is more effective, because nothing can surpass the power of an individual Christian persuading and leading by the force of his own personal experience. It is on this principle that the Brotherhood of St. Andrew in Canada and the United States is founded, and the One-by-One Society in our country acts in the same way. Such societies have learned, what every Christian must learn, viz. the duty and privilege of leading other individuals to the Master Who means so much to us.

**The in-
fluence of
a humble
worker.**

There is one other great truth written in the action of Andrew. When the latter brought Simon to our Lord he was introducing one who was destined to play a much bigger part than himself in the history of the Christian Church. Andrew never occupied a very prominent place among the early disciples, and nothing very much is heard of him. Peter, however, became the leader of the Twelve, and his influence was very great in the days after our Lord's Ascension, as the early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles show. It is not too much to say, moreover, that the influence of St. Peter was paramount in the Christian Church until the days of the Reformation. That a man who exercised such great influence on the course of Christianity should have been introduced to Christ by one who is comparatively unknown, gives

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food for much thought. It will be seen, however, **St. John** that the case of Andrew and Peter is no isolated **i. 40-42.** one. We can think of St. Paul and the boundless influence he exercised upon the development of Christianity, but it was the little-known Ananias of Damascus who opened his eyes to the truth. Or we may think of Martin Luther and the great work he was called by God to do in restoring the purity of the Christian faith, but it was the little-known Staupitz who pointed Luther to the doctrine of Justification by faith which is one of the key-notes of the Reformation. These and other like instances show us that God has very often used little-known people to bring to Christ those who have wrought great things for Him.

The moral of this is plain for all men to see : let us by our faithful witness and faithful work for Christ not miss our chance of bringing those who will be leaders in His service.

PRAYER

Almighty God, Who didst give such grace unto Thy holy Apostle Saint Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of Thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed Him without delay : Grant unto us all, that we, being called by Thy holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil Thy holy commandments : through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*—(*Book of Common Prayer.*)

XI

CHRIST'S DIVINE INSIGHT INTO THE CHARACTER OF HIS FIRST DISCIPLES

And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona : thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth ? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile ! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me ? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God ; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou ? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.—ST. JOHN I. 42-51.

St. John OUR Lord's first two followers were Andrew and
i. 42-51. John, and they followed Christ as a result of the Baptist's introduction, as well as a result of their interview. The link between the Baptist and our Lord is therefore seen in Andrew and John. The

Christ's Divine Insight

next stage in the making of Christian disciples takes **St. John** us away from the Baptist, and Christ now stands **i. 42-51.** face to face Himself with those who would follow Him.

In order to avoid any possible misunderstanding, it is well to point out that we are here dealing with events prior to the formal calling of the twelve disciples. In St. Matt. iv. 18, and in St. Mark i. 16, there is a reference to our Lord's call to some of the disciples to leave their work and to follow Him. This call, however, only came some time after the disciples had been following Christ. It was only after they had been taught by our Lord and had been tested by Him, that they were called to give up their ordinary occupations and to live continuously with their Master. What we see in the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, however, is the way in which the disciples first became acquainted with our Lord, and how they were first drawn to Him Who later on bade them leave their homes and follow Him throughout Palestine.

There are many features of interest in the examination of the way in which the first few disciples of our Lord were attracted to Him. Not least striking is it to notice the varying characteristics of the men who are brought to the notice of Christ. There are great differences in character between such men as Simon and Philip and Nathanael, but our Lord has the same attraction for them all. The main point in the Gospel, however, is not the disciples but the Master. The great thing, therefore, which St. John wishes to bring out here is that

**Differing
character-
istics.**

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St. John i. 42-51. Christ is able to read the character of those who are brought to Him. He wishes to show that Christ has a super-human knowledge of men, and that He can penetrate into the innermost recesses of every man's mind and soul. Because He can do this He can satisfy the deepest longings of every man, who in their turn acclaim Him their Lord and Master.

Simon. The first of the three interviews mentioned in verses 42-51 is that between our Lord and Simon. The latter, as we have seen, was brought to the notice of Christ by his brother Andrew, and when he came face to face with our Lord we read that the latter "beheld him." The verb which is used implies a keen penetrating look, and not merely a casual glance at a stranger who happened to be approaching. It meant the piercing glance which looked through the outward appearance of the man and saw into his very soul. And as He looked in this way upon His future disciple our Lord said, "Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone."

Now, these words show our Lord's miraculous insight into Simon's present character, as well as His prophecy about his future character. The first words, "Thou art Simon," do not indicate anything beyond a mere formal salutation, since Andrew would obviously have mentioned that Simon was his brother. But the words, "the son of Jona," or "the son of John," seem to imply a description of character, and the character is "the

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son of a dove." If this is so, then the character of **St. John** Simon at this time would be that of a timid and **i. 42-51.** inconstant man, and our Lord's greeting therefore would be, "Thou art Simon, the timid and irresolute." But Christ's greeting was not simply a description of the man as He saw him standing before Him, He went on to prophecy what Simon would become in the future, *i.e.* "Thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone." It is a prediction on the part of Christ that the man to whom He gives the new name of Cephas will, after training by Himself, become a changed character and will become strong and firm.

Our Lord's greeting of Simon, therefore, is in effect, "Thou art now Simon the fearful and inconstant; in days to come, when you have been taught by Me, you will become Cephas, a man with a character firm as a rock." That this prediction came true can be seen from the later history of Peter in the Gospels and in the Acts and Epistles. The inconstancy of character was not easily changed, but his Epistles show how he at length reached the position of unwavering trust and fidelity. What concerns us more immediately here, however, is that our Lord at His first meeting with Simon reads his unstable character, and predicts the future when he will become a man of firmness and steadfastness.

Our Lord's second interview is with Philip, but **Philip.** the great peculiarity about it is that it is Christ Himself who goes to find Philip, and then bids him "Follow Me." The reason why our Lord

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St. John should show the initiative in this way, and should
i. 42-51. Himself seek out Philip, seems to lie in the timid and retiring disposition of the would-be disciple. The latter was of the same village as Andrew and Simon, and he was evidently informed by his two friends of the Messiah they had found. But he is without initiative, he is slow to apprehend a truth, and his disposition is such that he will not come forward very willingly. Our Lord, however, knows of him through Andrew and Simon. He wants him numbered amongst His disciples, and so He goes Himself to invite Philip to follow Him.

That Christ should thus go Himself to invite Philip is a very helpful truth, and one that is bound to be of comfort to those of a retiring disposition. There are many Andrews and Simons in the world, who joyfully run with assurance to the Master when they hear His gracious invitations, but there are also many Philips who are fearful, and timid, and irresolute. They wonder whether the Gospel is indeed for them, they are amazed at the condescension of God in sending His Son to be the Saviour of men, and they ask if an insignificant member of humanity is worthy of His notice. But the Gospel is "WHOSOEVER will may come" and receive all that Christ offers, and among the first followers of our Lord we have this heartening example that Christ Himself "seeks and saves."

There is an additional truth in the narrative. After our Lord had deliberately gone to find Philip, the latter is absolutely convinced of the Messiahship of Christ. Now, however, the practical side of his

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nature is seen. Philip is the one who later on sees **St. John** the difficulty of feeding the multitude even with **i. 42-51** two hundred pennyworth of bread (vi. 5-7), and who again wants his difficulties about God cleared up (xiv. 8). He is the direct, practical man who wants to see things clearly, but who will act when he does so. So now when he knows Christ and has been found by Him, he goes off to Nathanael to tell him the good news. His careful statement to Nathanael about Christ (v. 45) shows the preciseness of the man's mind, but it shows also the conviction which had come to him. He is completely convinced himself, and because he is completely convinced he can quieten all Nathanael's objections with the invitation, "Come and see." Christ has so impressed Himself upon Philip that he is ready to invite all others to submit their doubts and difficulties to the test of their own experience of Christ. Thus, the first man to whom Christ says "Follow Me" is himself the first to appeal to others on the ground of personal experience. The third interview which our Lord has is thus due to Philip, but again the fact of outstanding importance is not even the method of the introduction of Nathanael **Nathanael.** to Christ, but our Lord's insight into Nathanael. As the latter approaches in the company of Philip, our Lord declares, "Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" The salutation seems a little strange to us, though it was evidently not so to Nathanael. It means in effect that our Lord saw in him a man who was a true son of the patriarch Jacob, and one in whom the guile of the Patriarch

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St. John i. 42-51. had given place to the uprightness which characterised Jacob in later life. It was therefore a striking testimony on the part of our Lord to the character of Nathanael.

Verse 48. But to Nathanael the testimony of Christ to his character is not the strange thing, it is rather how He could know anything about him at all. In answer, our Lord shows that He knew more about Nathanael than he ever dreamed of. When he was screened from public gaze, at home under the shade of his own fig tree, thinking his thoughts probably of the coming Messiah, Christ knew his meditations. There was therefore in the greetings of our Lord a supernatural knowledge, there was a comprehension of Nathanael which was outside the range of ordinary human experience. Such a knowledge of himself made Nathanael feel that he was in the presence of no ordinary man, and the conviction bursts upon him that before him stands the Messiah. He may have come from the despised Nazareth, but the insight of Christ has touched the inner consciousness of Nathanael, and so he cries out, "Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God : Thou art the King of Israel."

Here again we want to be careful to understand exactly what Nathanael's confession implies. To us the term "Son of God," when applied to our Lord, sums up all that we mean by the Divinity of Christ ; it connotes the Eternal Being of Christ and His Godhead, to which St. John refers in the first verse of his Gospel. The expression as used by Nathanael at this stage did not imply

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all this. The term "Son of God" was one of the **St. John** titles given to the Messiah (cf. St. Matt. xxvi. 63), **i. 42-51.** and the attribute of deity in the Christian sense was not involved in it. With this limitation, however, Nathanael's confession was the fullest recognition that in Christ he saw the long-expected Messiah, and that in Him he had found the Hope of Israel.

And because of this confession our Lord made the promise that greater things yet were to be seen, and that they were to "see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." The form of the promise may have been suggested by the fact that Bethel was not far away, and that the story of Jacob's ladder was a matter of strong local tradition. But the truth underlying our Lord's statement is very clear. He wants His hearers to understand that in and through Himself the link between heaven and earth is firmly established; He wishes to let them know that because of Himself there is now a continual intercourse between heaven and earth. The gulf between God and man which seemed impassable before, has now been bridged by Christ. The whole theme of the Gospel is crystallised in this truth, which very fittingly brings this first chapter to a close.

But behind this truth lies the great lesson of the Divine insight of our Lord, Who calls all types of men to follow Him and to share in the new life which links earth to heaven. Simon is brought by a brother's faith, but Christ reads his unstable character as He attaches him to Himself. Philip

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St. John the timid is dominated by the Personality of Christ,
i. 42-51. Who expressly calls him to "Follow Me." Nathanael, the true-hearted Jew, finds his prayers and thoughts read by the new Teacher Whom he spontaneously acclaims as the Messiah. And just as Christ read the character and innermost thoughts of these three men, so He reads us to-day. Our strength and our weakness are known to Him, our unspoken aspirations after truth, our silent longings after a better life, our deep-seated desires for the things of God, these and all such things are known to Him. Not only does He read them, but He can satisfy them, He can help us to translate our loftiest aspirations into actualities. In this way He can bring heaven and earth very close for us, for by His help we can be new creatures doing His will in earth as it is done in heaven.

"The lives which seem so poor, so low,
The hearts which are so cramped and dull,
The baffled hopes, the impulse slow.
Thou takest, touchest all, and lo!
They blossom and are beautiful."

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who knowest the inmost secrets of our hearts, Who readest our thoughts and knowest our unspoken desires for a fuller knowledge of Thee; be pleased by Thy Spirit to enlighten us on our way through life, make Thy Presence more real to us, pierce the veil of our human understanding by Thy heavenly wisdom, so that we may learn to know Thee better, to serve Thee more faithfully in this life, and may at length attain Thy heavenly promises. For Thy Name's sake. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XII

OUR LORD'S FIRST SIGN

And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee ; and the mother of Jesus was there : And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, *They have no wine.* Jesus saith unto her, *Woman, what have I to do with thee ? mine hour is not yet come.* His mother saith unto the servants, *Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it.* And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, *Fill the water-pots with water.* And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, *Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast.* And they bare *it.* When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was : (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, *Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine ; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse : but thou hast kept the good wine until now.* This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory ; and his disciples believed on him.—ST. JOHN II. 1-11.

THE whole of the first chapter of St. John's Gospel is of an introductory nature. St. John there makes clear first of all the Godhead of Christ, and the vital distinction between Him and the Baptist. He then narrates the way in which our Lord is recognised and introduced to men by His Fore-runner, he recounts the calling of the first followers of Christ, and our Lord's promise of the closer

St. John
ii. 1-11.

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St. John union between heaven and earth made possible
ii. 1-11. through Himself. All this, important though it is, is of a preliminary character, and is only introductory to the main theme of the Gospel.

The central purpose of the Gospel is quite clear, for St. John has a deliberate aim in writing. His whole idea is to bring about a belief in Christ which shall ensure eternal life to the believer, and the arrangement of the Gospel is planned with this end in view (xx. 30, 31). The first miracle of our Lord, therefore, is now recorded as part of a specific plan which will tend to bring belief in our Lord. One cannot help being struck with the naturalness of the occasion for the first demonstration of Christ's power. It was at the wedding festivities of friends known to Him. Cana was only about five or six miles from Nazareth, and our Lord was probably staying there for a time at the house of Nathanael. He and His friends had been invited to the ceremony, and our Lord's family was evidently on close terms of intimacy with those who were being married. Both Christ and the Virgin Mary can interfere with the servants and the household arrangements, and yet no one questions their interference. It was undoubtedly a gathering, therefore, of close friends as well as neighbours of our Lord.

Then the joyousness of the occasion demands attention. A wedding is always a matter for festivity, but the joyousness of a wedding in the East would seem extravagant to us prosaic English people. Music, distribution of wine and oil, ceremonial procession of the bride accompanied by

Our Lord's First Sign

friends carrying flowers and myrtle-branches and **St. John** lamps and torches, a feast lasting at least a day—**ii. 1-11.** these were only some of the joyous formalities which accompanied a wedding in Palestine. And it was in festivities and rejoicings of this character that our Lord took full part as a friend and neighbour.

It is very significant that the first public act of **Jesus not** Christ recorded by St. John should be one of this **an ascetic.** nature. It served, on the one hand, to remind His followers of the difference between the attitude of the Baptist and of their new Master. Christ was no ascetic like His Forerunner, but He was One Who entered into all the joys of life. His enjoyment of the marriage festivities was characteristic of His action at all times. He never hesitated to accept an invitation whether from the Pharisee Simon or from the Publican Zaccheus; He never scorned the joyous side of life, nor was He of those who refused the simple delights of life. He would have condemned those who would deny all the pleasures of life to men, just as He would have rebuked those who thought that God could only be faithfully served by the life of a hermit or of a monk. Christ's appearance at Cana is the consecration of the joys of life for God's glory as well as their consecration for the pleasure of men.

It may appear strange that our Lord's first miracle should be performed to supply a need which in itself was somewhat trivial, and that His first great sign should be shown when there did not seem sufficient cause for it. There are certain cir-

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St. John
ii. 1-11.

cumstances, however, which serve to explain how the miracle came in a fairly obvious way. It says in verse 2 that "they wanted wine," or more literally that "the wine failed." Now, the failure of the wine was probably due to the fact that our Lord brought with Him more friends than had been expected. We know from the previous chapter that Andrew, John, Peter, Philip, Nathanael, and possibly James, had become followers of Christ, and no doubt others had been attracted to Him while He was with Nathanael. Many people, moreover, would have heard of the Baptist's statement concerning Christ, and the calling of the first disciples must inevitably have been noised abroad. Curious strangers, therefore, were bound to have flocked to Cana to see Christ, and they would all have been invited to share in the festivities, in accordance with the proverbial hospitality of the East. Hence, in a measure, our Lord Himself would be the cause for the supply of wine giving out.

The failure of the wine, however, would not only distress the host because of the seeming discourtesy to his guests, it would prevent the proper performance of certain parts of the marriage festivities. Among the festivities were the seven ceremonial blessings, each of which was performed with the use of wine, and the marriage itself was usually considered not valid unless these blessings had been pronounced with the proper ceremony. If the above is correct, then the intervention of our Lord becomes more natural.

The Virgin
Mary.

But this raises the further question of the con-

Our Lord's First Sign

versation between the Virgin Mary and our Lord. **St. John**
Judging by the way in which our Lord and the **ii. 1-11.**
Virgin Mary gave instructions to the servants, it
seems evident that she was not merely a neighbour
but probably a relative or close friend of the family.
It is quite possible that she was in some way respon-
sible for the arrangements for the entertainment of
the guests, and that the onus of the failure of the
supply of wine would fall upon her. Since, moreover,
the advent of the followers of Christ had helped to
bring about the lack of wine, it was but natural
that the Virgin Mary should give vent to the state-
ment to our Lord, "they have no wine."

Now, these words of the Virgin Mary do not
necessarily imply a request for the performance of
miracle. There is nothing to show that Christ as
a youth was in the habit of performing miracles in
Nazareth, as some of the so-called "Lives of Christ's
Boyhood" imagine. The Virgin Mary, however,
was in the habit of relying upon Christ. Tradition
tells us that Joseph died when our Lord was young,
and as He grew to manhood the Virgin naturally
consulted Him about the ordinary difficulties in-
separable from every household. Viewed from this
standpoint, the Virgin Mary's words simply mean,
"There's no wine; what's to be done?" She is
simply asking advice and help from her Son, as she
has always done.

On the other hand, the nature of our Lord's
reply in verse 4 gives us to understand that the
Virgin Mary was evidently hinting at something
more than the usual advice. She knew of the

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St. John Angel's message to herself (St. Luke i. 26-33), and
ii. I-II. she was aware that Jesus was the "Son of the Highest." She knew that His public ministry had now begun, and she may have felt that a miracle performed in that company of friends and neighbours would have been an excellent means for drawing men to Him.

Our Lord's reply, however, is in the nature of a rebuke: "Woman," or "Lady," He says—and there is nothing discourteous in the mode of address—"what have I to do with Thee? mine hour is not yet come." The words are a plain statement that our Lord is now to pursue His ministry without any restraint from her who was His earthly mother. Just as He had gently reproved her in his boyhood with the words, "Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business" (St. Luke ii. 49), and just as He taught His relationship to the whole world when "He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren" (St. Matt. xii. 46-50), so also is it now at the outset of His public life. Our Lord never forgot what He owed to the Virgin Mary, and His tender thought for her as He hung upon the Cross showed His love for her (St. John xix. 25-27). But He will never allow her to presume upon her earthly relationship to Him, and He very plainly showed that she must give up any idea of influencing or guiding Him in His actions. He will no more give way to the Virgin Mary than He will to the demands of the Jews for a sign. The will of God is His guiding principle, and not that of man, and not

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even of her who was in such close earthly relation-
ship with Himself.

St. John
ii. 1-11.

Our Lord's further words, "mine hour is not yet come," sometimes cause a little difficulty. It seems to the general reader that in one sense the "hour" of Christ had begun, since He had already called men to be His followers. In St. John's Gospel, however, the expression is invariably associated with our Lord's death, and with the glorification of Christ which is to come from His death (cf. vii. 30 ; xii. 23, 27 ; xiii. 1). While, therefore, from our human standpoint the "hour" of Christ had come when now His glory was being revealed to mankind, on the other hand, the "hour" of Christ when He revealed Himself in all His fullness was still in the future. So our Lord's words to the Virgin would tell her that His way to the achievement of His Kingdom was not by the display of extraordinary powers. His miracles would serve their purpose in teaching something about Himself, but the road to His Kingdom and to His own glorification was not by an open display of miraculous powers, but by self-sacrifice and by the Cross.

Yet though our Lord thus gives this reproof to the Virgin Mary He at once proceeds to remedy the failure of the wine, which was due to the presence of so many of His own followers. Close by where He and the Virgin Mary had been speaking were six stone waterpots containing water for the ceremonial pouring of water over the hands of those present at the feast. In accordance with our Lord's

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St. John instructions, the pots were filled to the brim with
ii. I-II. water, and the total amount is estimated varyingly from about one hundred to a hundred and fifty gallons. With no gesture or parade of any kind, the miracle is completed, and the water now made wine is conveyed to the ruler, or manager, of the feast. This master of the marriage ceremonies was evidently a jocular man, for he declares that most men serve their guests first of all with good wine, and then when the guests have become drunk they serve up worse wine, but he complimented the bridegroom on having reserved his good wine to be drunk at so late a stage. There is no suggestion in the man's words that the guests at Cana were in any way the worse for drink, it is simply the playful, if coarse, allusion of an official to the fact that the new wine was of a better kind than what he had tasted before. The remark of this official, however, confirms, what the servants of the household knew, viz. that a miracle was performed.

Now, it may well be asked, what was the significance of a miracle of this kind, and what influence such an event could have in inducing belief in our Lord. That it had some significance to St. John is undoubted, if his statement in xx. 30, 31, is borne in mind, for the particular miracles recorded by St. John have all been chosen with the intent that they may produce belief in Christ. We find, moreover, that St. John does not use the word "miracle" in describing the turning of the water into wine. The Revised Version correctly translates the Greek word

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as "sign" both here and elsewhere in St. John's Gospel. Thus the correct rendering is, "This beginning of His signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory." This translation therefore states that St. John saw in our Lord's action at Cana a "sign," and a "sign," moreover, "which manifested His glory." **St. John ii. 1-11.**

What the miracle was a "sign" of is fairly clear. By the changing of the water into wine, Christ showed that He could change one substance into another. It was a sign that the Author of the world of nature was at work, and that He had the power to change the subjects of His own creation. That this has a bearing on the subject of regeneration described in St. John iii. we, who are now reading after the events, can plainly see. The great lesson which it would impress on those who witnessed it was that our Lord was the Master of the world of nature. They would see that Jesus of Nazareth was no ordinary man, but that He was One who had such power over inanimate nature that He could transform one substance into another. He could change a thing from one nature into another nature, which, from their point of view, was higher. **A testimony to Christ's creative power.**

It was for this reason that the miracle was a "sign" which manifested forth our Lord's glory, with the result that "His disciples believed on Him." The five or six men who had been following Christ now "trusted" Him, for such is the meaning of the expression "believed on Him." It was a personal trust, though not yet associated with our Lord's Divinity. It implies that from what they had seen

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St. John of Him, and from what they now knew of Him, they
ii. 1-11. gave Him their complete confidence.

So as we meditate upon this first miracle of our Lord we can see certain truths for ourselves to-day. First and foremost we find in it a sign that Christ is the Master, and not the Servant, of what He created. Since "all things were made by Him," it is clear that He has control over the things He created. The poetic statement that at Cana "the conscious water saw its God, and blushed," is but another way of saying that Christ is the Lord of Creation, and that the world of nature is under His control. He therefore can change a substance from one nature into another. But since He can change one substance into another, this throws light upon the way in which man can have his nature changed (cf. St. John iii. 3). Man's nature can be changed by Christ just as readily as the water was changed into wine. This is the great outstanding truth to which the sign points.

The inference for the spiritual world.

A subsidiary truth, but one which is important for all to consider, is that our Christian faith is meant to bring joy into our lives and not gloom. It is a mistaken view of Christianity which looks on all relaxations with cold disapproval, and which finds the taint of evil in every form of enjoyment. There is a false view of the other extreme, which will debar the Christian from no forms of amusement and which will put no limit upon self-indulgence in any way. Both points of view have their dangers. As Christians, however, we see our Master taking His full share in all the ordinary social pleasures of

Our Lord's First Sign

His day, and it is our place to see that encouragement is given to all healthy social intercourse. **St. John ii. 1-11.**

Then in the sign which proclaimed our Lord's power, and in all the joyous associations connected with this marriage feast, we can think of what "His glory" means to us. To the disciples who witnessed the miracle, it was a manifestation of the glory of His Person because they saw in Him One Who was not as other men, and it was a revelation of the glory of the work of transformation which He was to perform later in the hearts of men. In the same way as we think upon the miracle we shall see in it, not merely an exhibition of extraordinary power, but a reflection of the glory of Him Who performs the great work of "re-birth" upon men to-day.

PRAYERS

O God, our heavenly Father, Whose blessed Son manifested forth His glory at Cana in changing the water into wine, help us to realise that in Him and through Him we can be born again, and that we can be changed from an earthly to a heavenly nature Through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst adorn the marriage feast at Cana with Thy Presence, teach us to see Thee in all the joys of life, enable us to bring Thee with us into all the pleasures of life, and grant that we may never dishonour Thee by wilful misuse of the good things Thou dost provide for us, for Thy Name's Sake. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XIII

CHRIST AT CAPERNAUM

After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples : and they continued there not many days.—St. JOHN II. 12.

St. John
ii. 12.

AT first sight there seems a sort of anti-climax in the sequence of verses 11 and 12 of this chapter. It appears somewhat incongruous that the account of the sign which manifested forth Christ's glory should be followed by the apparently humdrum reference to Christ's relatives, and to the sojourn at Capernaum. The very strangeness of the verse occurring where it does makes us feel, however, that it was placed there of set purpose. A writer who was merely imagining things, or was simply writing a philosophical treatise, as some people have imagined of St. John, would not have interpolated this verse here. He would simply have gone on from the sign at Cana to the Cleansing of the Temple at Jerusalem. For Cana spoke of Christ's power, and the Cleansing of the Temple spoke of His authority. But this verse speaks of Christ from quite a different aspect, it bids us look at His human character. What, then, is the significance of it ?

It will be noticed from St. Luke iv. 16-29, that

Christ at Capernaum

our Lord was practically forced to leave His native **St. John** place, Nazareth. His statement; "No prophet is **ii. 12.** accepted in his own country," proved true in His own case, and the opposition and the attempted violence compelled Him to change His abode from Nazareth to Capernaum. St. John's words that "they continued there not many days" must not be read in the sense that Christ only stayed there for a short time, because St. John simply means that they only stayed at Capernaum for a few days before going up to Jerusalem for the Cleansing of the Temple. It seems clear, however, from the other Gospels that after our Lord's rejection at Nazareth, He made Capernaum His headquarters. St. Matthew (ix. 1) refers to Capernaum as Christ's "own city," and St. Mark (ii. 1, R.V. margin) says that there He was "at home." Evidently our Lord's people had gone to settle there after His rejection, and the large number of miracles which He performed at Capernaum (cf. St. Matt. viii. 5; St. Mark i. 23, 31; ii. 1; St. John iv. 46) showed how He was in the habit of staying there for considerable periods.

Probably for the greater part of two years of His public ministry our Lord made Capernaum His home, and no place could have been better suited as a centre for His work. It was situated on the Lake of Galilee, and was excellently placed for various reasons. For instance, the great Roman road from Damascus to Egypt ran by it, and thus it was accessible to travellers from far and near, and so became a great emporium for trade. Con-

**Importance
of Caper-
naum.**

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St. John
ii. 12.

sequently Capernaum became an important customs depôt of the Romans, and Matthew, sitting to receive the tolls from those who used the road, reminds us of the importance of Capernaum in this respect. Within a couple of miles from Capernaum, also, there were large tannery and pottery works employing great numbers of workpeople. Round the Lake itself were other important towns such as Bethsaida, Tiberias, Magdala, Chorazin, Gergesa, and others. Each of them was a thriving business centre with a large population engaged in tanning, shipbuilding and dyeing. Close at hand also were fashionable watering-places frequented by the wealthy Romans and Greeks. Capernaum, therefore, was a place humming with the activities of industrial life; it was a centre where the traders of the world met for business; it was, in short, one of the most cosmopolitan towns of the time. Such was the home and headquarters of our Lord for two years of His ministry, and His abode there serves above all to remind us that our Lord was very closely acquainted with the actualities of life.

Christ's
new home.

The other fact mentioned by St. John is also related to the same truth. He states that Christ "went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren . . ." and the transparent explanation is, as we have seen, that our Lord's home was changed from Nazareth to Capernaum. It was the family circle of which Christ formed part which was transferred to the commercial centre on the shore of the lake. Many writers of the Christian Church, however, have made

Christ at Capernaum

difficulties over the meaning of the words St. John "His brethren." They have either asserted that ii. 12.

the "brethren" referred to were the children of Joseph by a former marriage, or that they were the adopted children of Joseph, or that they were not really "brothers" of our Lord, but "cousins."

Those who have put forward such theories have usually done so with the intention of exalting the mother of our Lord as a perpetual virgin, but the interpretation of the New Testament is against such a view. Reference to St. Matt. i. 25, and to St. Matt. xiii. 55, will show us the naturalness of the relationship to Christ of those who are called "His brethren." The plain interpretation, both of St. John's words, as well as of St. Matthew's, is that our Lord was one of a family of sons and daughters, and that this family changed their abode from Nazareth to Capernaum after Christ's rejection by His native place.

It will now be more apparent what truths follow from this verse.

In the first place it reminds us of the human side of our Lord's life. Since it speaks to us of the human ties which held Christ, it serves to bring home to us the humanity which links Him with ourselves. It just seems as though St. John, now launching out into a demonstration of the power of Christ which will show His divinity, suddenly stops short to remind us of His real humanity as well. But it tells us not merely of His humanity, important though this is for us, it goes on to reveal that Christ was one with us in our natural relationships. Since

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St. John ii. 12. our Lord had brothers and sisters, and thus grew up as one of a family, it brings home to us that He has a knowledge of ordinary human existence, and that He knows the meaning of an ordinary family life. The implications of such a fact will be readily appreciated by all of us. It not only hallows home and family life, but it enables us to see that in everything connected with our home-life, its joys and its sorrows, its greatnesses and its littlenesses, our Lord had His part.

We may therefore be encouraged to bring all the concerns of home and family life to Him in prayer, knowing that He will understand and sympathise not merely as God, but also as Man.

Our Lord's membership of a home of brothers and sisters is only one aspect of His life which draws Him near to us, for His sojourn in Capernaum also tends to do the same. Capernaum, as we have seen, was a town humming with busy life ; it was not only a commercial town itself, but was also the centre of a crowded neighbourhood. Those who have been engaged in the work of exploration in Palestine in recent years tell us that Nazareth itself was no mere country village, but a busy town of probably 20,000 inhabitants, and that the cities round the Sea of Galilee were crowded with inhabitants. Christ's life, therefore, was lived in the midst of everyday occupations. His was not the life of a recluse, nor was it simply a life of philosophic contemplation, but it was a life lived in close touch with life. This again will help us when we are faced with the difficulties which confront us

Christ at Capernaum

in the busy work-a-day world. We can feel that **St. John** the particular problems which confront us, arising **ii. 12.** from our contact with the life of our day, are not unknown to Him. Too often men have felt that the conditions of our Lord's life and the conditions under which He lived, were so different from those of to-day, that there is little application to-day for some of His sayings. The more we learn of the conditions of our Lord's day, however, the more we can see the close resemblance between His times and our own. In consequence we can again feel that the difficulties which we have to face, were in many ways the sort of difficulties which He Himself had to face. We can therefore bring to Him all our difficulties, knowing that as Man He had something of our experience.

If, however, our Lord's contact with life in its varied forms at Capernaum enables us to realise with more vividness His sympathetic appreciation of our own position to-day, we must not overlook another equally important truth. Since Christ was living in the hurly-burly of life, it is clear that He meant His commands to be applied to the everyday life which He knew. Two illustrations of this side of the matter will make this aspect clearer.

In the first place, we have seen above that Capernaum was essentially a commercial town; it had a many-sided industrial life, and whatever else it was, business was the key-note of the place. It was in this atmosphere of commercialism that our Lord was living, and it was in practical touch with this keen trading spirit that our Lord was spending most

**Christ's
contact
with
commercial
life.**

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St. John of His days. And what utter nonsense it would
ii. 12. have sounded to the keen business men of Capernaum to hear our Lord say, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness . . ."! And how futile it would have sounded to many a dispirited workman of Capernaum to hear Christ say, "Take no anxious thought for the morrow. . . ."! In reading such commands of Christ to-day, therefore, we must ever be on our guard against thinking that they are merely idealistic or visionary, or suitable perhaps for a simpler age than our own. We have to remember that the commercial conditions of our Lord's time were in their way just as keen, and just as hard, as those of to-day, and that for this very reason the commands were given.

**Inter-
national
relation-
ships.**

The second illustration touches both the international aspect of life as well as the personal side. Capernaum by its trade and position was very cosmopolitan. There was a large Roman garrison in the town to begin with, and in addition the ordinary course of business meant that the Jews were in daily contact with Romans and Greeks, as well as with Egyptians, Phœnicians and Syrians. Knowing this, how very striking some of our Lord's statements sound! "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you"—such a command would only sound like lunacy to a Capernaum Jew, who hated his foreign neighbours with a hatred compared with which the mutual regard of Germans and French to-day would be loving-kindness. But the principle of international amity is laid down by our Lord in

Christ at Capernaum

the very place where it was obviously needed. **St. John**
It was stated in general terms which were applicable **ii. 12.**
for the nation as a whole, and in terms which equally
applied to the individual. The command, "Whoso-
ever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him
twain," is part of the same injunction of the way in
which the individual Jew is to obey the foreign
Roman master. But both for the nation as well
as for the individual, the command is laid down by
Christ, embodying the principle of love both inter-
nationally as well as personally. It is impossible
for us to consider in detail here the application of
this principle, but the principle itself must not be
overlooked, since it is wrapped up with all that
Capernaum stands for in the life of our Lord. The
plain teaching is that international life, equally
with individual personal life, comes under the scope
of the teaching of Christ.

Thus we can see the importance of this apparently
trivial verse, which seems thrust in haphazard
between two striking events. It makes us feel
how very near Christ is to us first of all in the homely
concerns of life, and how the affairs of everyday
existence are known to Him by practical experience.
It shows us the close contact of our Lord with the
commercial problems of His own day, and it enables
us to feel that obedience to His commands is the
necessary pre-requisite for the solution of the ills
of our own commercialised age. And it helps us
to feel that in the wider problems of to-day, which
have been generated by the suspicion and hatred
of one nation for another, the only hope lies in

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St. John
ii. 12. obedience to the commands of Him Who knows from practical experience the meaning of national hatreds. In Christ lies not only the hope of personal redemption now and salvation in the world to come, in Him also lies the only hope for the regeneration of the present world, and through Him alone can God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst deign to live in a humble home at Nazareth and at Capernaum, and Who didst spend Thy life in the busy haunts of men, sharing their troubles and lightening their burdens, Be pleased to direct us upon the road where Thou Thyself as Man hast trod : Enlighten our understanding that we may see our duty in the affairs of everyday life, strengthen us by Thy grace that we may seek to do Thy will in all that concerns us of business or of public life. And guide us by Thy Spirit that we may help forward the day when truth and justice, peace and happiness will be established among us and among all nations : We ask it for Thy Name's sake. *Amen.*—
(T. W. G.)

XIV

THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE

And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

Then answered the Jews and said unto him, What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body. When therefore he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this unto them; and they believed the scripture, and the word which Jesus had said.—ST. JOHN II. 13-22.

OUR Lord's sojourn at Capernaum at this time was of short duration. He remained at His new home by the Sea of Galilee "not many days," St. John tells us, because He went from Galilee to Jerusalem. At Cana, Christ's power had been made known in the first great sign He had performed there, but St. John records another incident, this time in

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St. John ii. 13-22. Jerusalem, which revealed something of the amazing moral authority of our Lord.

Two
cleansings
of the
Temple.

There is an account of the Cleansing of the Temple given by the three Synoptic Gospels towards the end of our Lord's ministry (cf. St. Matt. xxi. 12, 13), and it is sometimes thought that St. John is referring to this particular incident. There is little or nothing, however, to support such a contention. St. John does undoubtedly make a choice of the facts of our Lord's life which he knew, but this is not to say that he re-arranges the facts and alters their sequence. Judging by the details of the two accounts, it is evident that they refer to different occurrences and that there were two Cleansings of the Temple, one at the beginning and one towards the end of the ministry.

The incident falls quite naturally into the order of events in our Lord's life. He had revealed Himself in Galilee, and had been recognised there as the Messiah. It was perfectly natural that He should now go to the centre of Jewish life and there make Himself known.

The time chosen for the visit was one of the annual Passover feasts (cf. Exod. xii.), when Jerusalem would be crowded, and no doubt our Lord's visit and actions were planned deliberately, both on account of the crowds as well as on account of what He was about to do. For it will be quite clear that the particular things which met with our Lord's condemnation on His visit were matters of long standing which had hardened into custom, and Christ therefore went to Jerusalem and to the

The Cleansing of the Temple

Temple knowing full well what He would find there. **St. John**
Verse 14 tells us what He actually encountered, **ii. 13-22.**
i.e. He "found in the temple those that sold oxen
and sheep and doves, and the changers of money
sitting."

Now, there was a certain amount of justification **The sheep**
for what our Lord found within the precincts of **and doves.**
the Temple. The oxen and sheep and doves were
required for sacrificial purposes, and it was a matter
of convenience to pilgrims and visitors that they
could be obtained in close proximity to the Temple.
It is probable that stalls had been set up near the
Temple at first, and then as the convenience proved
popular, more stalls were erected until eventually
they found a place in the Court of Gentiles.

So also with the money-changers. A business of **The money-**
this kind was an absolute necessity in Palestine, for **changers.**
in addition to the ordinary Palestinian silver and
copper coins there was also in circulation Roman,
Grecian, Egyptian, Syrian, Tyrian and Persian
money. Moreover, there was a very practical need
for the money-changers, because of the obligation
on all visitors to pay the Temple-tax of half a
shekel (Exod. xxx. 13). No foreign money was
allowed into the Temple Treasury, and therefore
before the Feast the work of money-changing was
brisk throughout Palestine. For nearly a fort-
night before the Feast the money-changers opened
stalls in every town, and then just before the
Feast the stalls were closed and transferred to the
Temple.

Therefore, both in the case of the animals and

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St. John ii. 13-22. birds for sacrifice, as well as with the money-changers, it was a great convenience to have them in the Court of Gentiles. But while there was a saving of trouble in the arrangement, it is clear that the stalls and the tables had encroached on sacred ground. This in itself was not necessarily condemnatory if the practice had been forced on simply and solely for the convenience of pilgrims. It is evident, however, that the High Priest had a pecuniary interest in the arrangement, and it is very significant that in the second Cleansing of the Temple our Lord refers to the Temple as "a den of thieves" (St. Matt. xxi. 13). The corrupt practices which are referred to in our Lord's words were a matter of public notoriety, and nearly forty years later the people themselves swept away the Temple market because of the greed of the High Priests.

**Danger of
com-
mercialism.**

It is a typical illustration of how a practice primarily legitimate may ultimately become sinful. It shows how what was first a matter of convenience in the ritual of religious observance, can degenerate into something which tends to crush out the reality of the observance. The ritual observance may be stimulated by self-interested High Priests, and the crowds of worshippers may give a picture of seeming success to the worship. But when commercialism enters into the domain of worship, spirituality very soon goes out, and when the canker of self-interest is there to encourage religious formalism, then the lower motive is bound to react disastrously upon the religious practices. From this point of view, therefore, it can be seen what danger threatened

The Cleansing of the Temple

the reality of Temple worship at the time, and it **St. John**
can be readily understood why our Lord should **ii. 13-22.**
have gone to Jerusalem to act in the way He did.

When our Lord and His disciples got to the Temple, they found themselves in the midst of the seething mass of buyers and sellers in the Court of the Gentiles. Around them were the animals in their stalls, the cages of doves, and the money-changers with their tables, all creating an atmosphere of the market-place, and all permeated with the huckstering which brought degradation to the sacred building where they were congregated. Christ therefore made a scourge of small cords from the halters of the animals, and with it drove the sheep and oxen out of the Temple, overturned the tables of the money-changers, and ordered the owners of the doves to carry away the cages of birds.

It seems strange that the traders should have meekly acquiesced in our Lord's command, especially when they knew that their occupation was sanctioned and encouraged by the rulers of the Temple. The very fact that they so soon afterwards returned to the Court of the Gentiles, and that they needed a second expulsion two years or so later, makes it extraordinary that they should have allowed themselves to be driven out in a body now without protest. It is the more striking when one remembers how early the event took place in our Lord's public life. But we can well understand that Christ's revelation of Himself in Galilee as the Messiah would now be a matter of common knowledge. The pilgrims from Galilee

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St. John ii. 13-22. would make this fact known in Jerusalem, and the news would very soon be in the possession of every one in Jerusalem. The presence of Christ, therefore, in the Temple would not be altogether unexpected. But what would lend point to His appearance was the prophecy of Malachi that "the Lord shall suddenly come to His temple," and that "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Mal. iii. 1-3). The appearance of the Messiah, therefore, was looked for in the Temple, and His coming was linked up with the purification of the Temple. In the face of these facts we can understand that it was conscience-stricken Jews who saw in Christ the Messiah of prophecy come to fulfil the prediction of purifying the Temple, and because "conscience makes cowards of us all" they fled in confusion before the accusing moral authority of the Messiah.

Christ asserts His Messiahship.

This explanation enables us to see how the Cleansing of the Temple is associated with our Lord's claims as the Messiah. The disciples saw in it a fulfilment of prophecy associated with One Who was of David (cf. Ps. lxxix. 9), and an action which showed true fearlessness in defence of the House of God (v. 17). The rulers of the Temple, however, went much further. Their request in verse 18 shows that they had associated the Cleansing with something like the prophecy in Malachi, and therefore they saw in our Lord's action a claim to prophetic office. Our Lord, however, distinctly

The Cleansing of the Temple

says that the Cleansing was for the purification of **St. John** His Father's house (v. 16). Just as He had mystified **ii. 13-22.** the Virgin Mary with the query, "Wist ye not that I must be in My Father's house?" (St. Luke ii. 49, R.V.), so the Cleansing is justified to purify "My Father's house." In the eyes of every one, therefore, disciples, Jews, our Lord Himself, the Cleansing is associated with the authority of Christ.

But it was just because the claim of authority was found in this drastic action of our Lord, that the Jews came forward demanding a sign from Christ to justify Himself for what He had done. It looks, from verse 18, as though the rulers of the Temple had been completely taken by surprise at our Lord's action, but when they had had time for a brief conversation among themselves they came forward with the demand for a sign. It may be mentioned in passing that the expression "the Jews" is generally used by St. John for the opponents of Christ, and here it evidently refers to the rulers of the Temple. The request for the sign, therefore, is not a plea for proof of Messiahship, it is a challenge to Christ's assumption of authority, and a challenge in view of His Messianic claim.

The moral sense of the rulers of the Temple, however, must have been blunted, otherwise they would not have questioned Christ's right to purify the Temple. But self-interest blinds them to their own position as degraders of the Temple, and their demand to Christ is simply a retort to One Who dares to disturb their pecuniarily satisfactory position.

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St. John Our Lord's reply to the rulers was mysterious,
ii. 13-22. and was no doubt meant to be so. He says, in effect, "You want a sign from Me to justify the action I have taken in purifying My Father's house. Well then, I will give you a sign. Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews were completely nonplussed by the answer, as their exclamation in verse 20 shows. Zerubbabel's Temple was being rebuilt at the time, and the work of rebuilding was not complete until A.D. 64, so the mystification of the Jews is understandable. But though the Jews saw nothing allegorical in the statement, they treasured it up against Christ, as was seen later at His trial (St. Matt. xxvi. 61). The disciples themselves were in no better case, and did not see the significance of their Master's words until after the Resurrection.

The spiritual Temple

Yet our Lord's words contain a great truth. They refer primarily to His death and resurrection, and we can now see that in the death of Himself He raised up a new Temple. By His redemption He raised up a new spiritual house of God, a new Church of those who worship God in spirit and in truth. St. Paul learned this truth later when he said, ye "are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone: In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In Whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 20-22).

The Cleansing of the Temple

The whole incident shows how thus early in our **St. John** Lord's public ministry there appear certain factors **ii. 13-22.** which are never to be absent. So far as the Jews are concerned, there is the evidence of their spiritual declension. Their religious observance is strong, and their religious ritual is universally supported, but it is corrupted by the lower motives of greed on the part of the rulers. Because of this, there is at once a challenge to the One Who calls them to eliminate the unworthiness that is in their worship of God. At the very outset, the rulers of the Jews set themselves in opposition to Christ when He interferes with their methods of organising religious worship.

On the other hand, we find in the acts and words of our Lord an implicit claim to authority. Nay, His emphasis upon "My Father's" house marks the occasion as a justification of Himself because of His unique relationship to God. But while this claim exalted Christ above the ranks of ordinary men, there is also to be found with it the royal road by which the Son of God always travels, and that is by the way of Calvary. Divinity and Calvary—how incongruous they seem to the superficial reader! but the whole Christian faith is wrapped up in these two words. And this truth is found recorded here.

So, therefore, this incident calls us first to self-examination with regard to our own public or private worship. It bids us ask ourselves whether in our worship of God, unworthy elements may have crept in, and whether commercial interests are sapping the reality of our worship. It makes us ask whether self-interest is at the bottom of our

The
practical
lesson.

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St. John religious observance, or whether the mere ritual
ii. 13-22. of outward worship is the predominating factor in our mind. It calls, therefore, for greater purity of motive in all our worship of God.

And because it calls for purity of motive in worship, it throws us back again upon our Lord's Death and Resurrection. In and through Him by His Cross we are made part of the spiritual edifice He is building, and we need to ask whether we have consciously realised this truth, viz. that He has redeemed us to form part of His living temple, the temple of which He is the corner stone ?

This also throws us back upon the further question whether we ourselves individually are in reality "living temples." It brings us face to face with one of the fundamental facts of the Christian faith when we ask ourselves whether we really feel and know that the Spirit of God dwells in us (cf. 1 Cor. iii. 16). Here is the basis for all true worship of God, for as we live by His Spirit so all our worship will be real ; it will be in spirit and in truth.

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who died that we might live, and Who livest evermore to help us by Thy Spirit, make us continually to realise that Thou art always with us, and that by Thy Holy Spirit Thou art ever at our side ; may we feel that we are indeed "living temples" for Thee, and may our lives show that we are ever having converse with Thee ; and as we hold communion with Thee in public worship or in private, cleanse our hearts from all unworthy feelings, and purify our souls from worldly motives, so that our worship may ever be pleasing in Thy sight : In Thine own Name we ask it. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XV

THE READER OF MEN'S HEARTS

Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*, And needed not that any should testify of man: for he knew what was in man.—ST. JOHN II. 23-25.

THE Cleansing of the Temple had focussed the **St. John** attention of the people of Jerusalem upon our Lord. **ii. 23-25.** The crowds of Passover pilgrims had been excited by the unprecedented action of Christ, and the interest aroused would give Him great opportunities for teaching and preaching in the Temple courts. No details are given of His doings beyond the fact that He performed some miracles or signs. It can be assumed, however, that the Cleansing took place on the eve of the Passover feast, and that our Lord's activities were continued during the seven days of unleavened bread which followed (Lev. xxiii. 6). It was during these seven days that the signs or miracles were performed. None of them are recorded by St. John, though he makes further reference to them in iii. 3 and iv. 45, but in accordance with his own plan of writing (xx. 30, 31),

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St. John ii. 23-25. and owing to the impossibility of giving anything more than the salient features of our Lord's life and teaching (xxi. 25), he gives no details of the actual occurrences.

St. John here seems to be concerned with the results following from the miracles, rather than with the miracles themselves. This fact is, of course, true of St. John's Gospel as a whole, since the seven great signs are definitely associated with some actual teaching concerning our Lord and His power. But so far as the miracles performed by Christ after the Cleansing are concerned, we have neither details of the miracles nor of any teaching therewith. What we do have, however, are certain important facts resulting from the signs.

“Behold
with
wonder.”

St. John tells us, first of all, that “many believed in His Name when they saw the miracles which He did.” Now, there are two points of importance wrapped up in these words. In the first place the verb “saw,” or “beholding” as the Revised Version puts it, is the translation of a Greek word which carries with it the sense of wonder and of awe. Therefore what St. John is telling us is that the signs performed by our Lord produced a feeling of wonder or amazement in those who saw them, and that they were impressed to such an extent that they “believed in His Name.”

We of the present day are not likely to be over-impressed by miracles. We might be astonished by them, but there would always be the feeling that there was a trick somewhere, or that some apparently supra-normal element had been acted upon by the

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“miracle-worker,” or that there was some purely **St. John** psychological explanation behind them. Moreover, **ii. 23-25.** whatever our particular feelings might be with regard to the miracles, it is quite unlikely that they would be the means of converting us to a particular faith. The reason is that we to-day look for a moral element in our faith and not for mere wonders. With all reverence be it said, but the average Christian is drawn near to Christ to-day not by His miracles but by the love which prompts the miracles; not by the wonder which gives health and life to the sick in body, but by the fact that such wonders reveal to us the reality of the love of our Father.

Such, however, was not the point of view of the Jews. They expected to see miracles performed by their great men. The leading Rabbis were popularly supposed to be workers of wonders, and the miraculous element was always expected from a great teacher. For instance, when our Lord was tempted to cast Himself down from a pinnacle of the Temple, it was part of a subtle scheme by which He could strike the imagination of the Jews with a miraculous act; it was simply an appeal to debase Himself to the popular idea which associated wonders with the coming Messiah, as with the prophets and the Rabbis. Bearing this in view, we can see that St. John is telling us that what has happened to the Jews is that they have been struck with the wonders which Christ has performed, and that they have been amazed at the extraordinary powers He has displayed. The wonder and the amazement, however, are simply of a character

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St. John which makes them see in Christ, a man more than
ii. 23-25. ordinary, a great Rabbi possibly, or a great prophet.
This is further evidenced by St. John's statement
that the miracles produced a belief "in His Name."
The limitations of such a belief are fairly evident.
It was not a belief in Him personally such as the
disciples had (ii. 11), and it was clearly not the
belief referred to in iii. 18; it was simply a mental
acquiescence in the fact that they saw in Him
One Who might be the Messiah, or the great Prophet
of whom Moses spoke (Deut. xviii. 15).

**A super-
ficial belief.** We can see from the next verse how our Lord
Himself recognised the very superficial character of
the faith of those who "believed in His Name,
when they saw the miracles which He did." St.
John says, "Jesus did not commit Himself unto
them," and there is a play upon words in the Greek
which is not apparent in the English translation.
In the Greek the same verb is used for "believed"
(v. 23) as for "commit" (v. 24), and the contrast
in St. John's mind may be seen if the Greek word
is translated by its English equivalent "trust,"
i.e. "many TRUSTED in His name, when they saw
the miracles which He did. But Jesus did not
TRUST Himself unto them. . . ." Now, the ques-
tion raises itself at once, why did our Lord deprecate
a belief of this sort? We know that St. John has
deliberately chosen and related certain of the great
miracles performed by our Lord, with the express
purpose that they may be used to convince people
"that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (xx. 31).
It would seem from this, that the belief of the Jews

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referred to in verse 23 should have been encouraged, St. John so that eventually they would arrive at the point ii. 23-25. for which St. John himself was writing.

But if we bear in mind what was said above with regard to the Jewish association of wonders with their Rabbis, we can see that the belief of the Jews mentioned in verse 23 was a mere belief in a wonder-working Christ, and nothing more. Consequently it was an acceptance of Christ as Messiah on their own terms, the terms simply of a Leader who must always work similar wonders. They would expect His mission to run always on these lines, and the offer to make Christ King of the Jews (vi. 15) was the climax to this type of belief. Whatever else these men may have seen in our Lord's miracles, they did not see the moral element in and behind the signs, they did not discern the love of God in Christ working for the alleviation of mankind, they saw nothing which brought God nearer to them. All that they saw was a Great Man, who could perform wondrous deeds, a Man whose great powers would fit Him to be their Leader, and by whose means they might procure political emancipation. For this reason, Christ did not accept their "trust," and He did not "trust" Himself to them.

Very significantly, therefore, does St. John say, "He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man; for He knew what was in man." The statement tells us that our Lord could read the thoughts of the Jews who were attracted to Him, and that He was completely cognisant of their

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St. John ideas about Himself. This does not mean that
ii. 23-25. our Lord then had the insight which He now has of us as the Ascended Lord. He is our reigning and omnipotent Lord now, but He lived on this earth with all the limitations due to manhood. At the same time He was Perfect Man, and the perfection of His manhood caused Him, on the one hand, to be in unbroken communion with His Father, and, on the other hand, gave Him a perception of those around Him which none else has had. He passed among men, seeing them with X-ray-like vision, penetrating into the very secrets of their soul. Peter, Nathanael, Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the captious scribes (St. Matt. ix. 4), He knew their unspoken longings, He read their unspoken desires. The thoughts of all men were never concealed from Him. And so He read the thoughts of the Jews who "believed on His Name," He knew their belief was unworthy of the Son of God, and therefore He "did not trust Himself unto them."

This interlude, so to speak, in the main narrative of the Gospel, therefore, bids us ask ourselves first of all, why do we to-day believe in Jesus Christ? Is our faith based primarily upon the fact that He did such things as heal the sick, raise the dead, and that He Himself rose from the dead? If our faith is of this kind it is imperfect, and not very much dissimilar to that of the Jews, for it rests upon an unstable foundation. But if we regard the miracles as part of the revelation of His character as the Son of God, then it is a different matter. Our Lord's miracles then become an expression of His love,

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and not simply an example of power; they are seen as part of the beneficent character of Christ and not merely as examples of striking deeds. Christ's miracles were performed PRIMARILY to relieve particular distresses, not PRIMARILY to show supra-natural powers, and it is the character of God we see in the miracles and not merely His power. There are no meaningless marvels in the miracles; they are always spontaneous, arising out of some immediate necessity, and never used for public advertisement. They were performed not merely as examples of "works which none other man did" (St. John xv. 24), but because Christ could not help performing them. He saw the need of man and satisfied the need, because His love could do no otherwise. Our belief, therefore, should rest in His love, a love which in truth may express itself in miracle. But it is the love which is the greater thing, not the miracle.

Then we are reminded by these verses of our Lord's intimate knowledge of us. As the Son of Man when He walked this earth, He knew men, and their very thoughts were not hidden from Him, but now as God He knows us yet more intimately. The unspoken desires, the secret longings of the soul, all those innermost secrets which none are aware of but ourselves, all these lie open to Him. This truth may comfort us when we think of our strivings after better things; it may bring some consolation to realise that our struggles to live a better and purer life are all known to Him. It will hearten many sincere souls to feel that their

St. John
ii. 23-25.
The true
meaning of
miracles.

The com-
fort in
Christ's
knowledge
of us.

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St. John ii. 23-25. ideas and ideals, though sometimes unrealised, are all known to their Master. But it may prove otherwise with many Christians. They will not care to know that Christ can read their low and it may be debasing thoughts, they will shrink from the thought that He knows their unworthy motives, and they will strive to forget that He can see their purely worldly standard of conduct. In our innermost selves we are either building up or sapping our Christian character, and the fact may be known only to two, *i.e.* to oneself and to Christ. Can we contemplate the thought that Christ may not "trust Himself" to us individually now, just as He could not "trust Himself" to the superficial Jews in Jerusalem?

PRAYER

Almighty God, unto Whom all hearts be open, all desires known, and from Whom no secrets are hid; Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love Thee, and worthily magnify Thy holy Name: through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*—
(*Book of Common Prayer.*)

XVI

THE NEW BIRTH

There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews : The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God : for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old ? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born ? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh ; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be ? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things ? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen ; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things ? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is in heaven.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up : That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.—ST. JOHN III. 1-16.

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St. John THE influence of the signs referred to in ii. 23 is
iii. 1-16. important, not only for the reasons we have just
been considering, but also because they are the
direct cause for the enunciation of some of the
greatest truths concerning our spiritual life. It is
these undescribed signs performed after the Cleans-
ing of the Temple, which bring about our Lord's
interview with Nicodemus, with all that that
interview involves.

Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the
Jews, and as such was a man of considerable
prominence amongst his countrymen. Moreover,
he is referred to by our Lord as "a Master of Israel,"
or, as the Revised Version more accurately translates
it, "the Teacher of Israel." The designation evi-
dently implies an official position, and probably
refers to Nicodemus as the man who was the official
exponent of the decrees of the Sanhedrin, or the
Rabbi who was regarded as the recognised expounder
of Judaism. Holding such a position he would be
looked upon as next in importance to the High
Priest or to the President of the Sanhedrin.
Nicodemus, therefore, was a man of outstanding
importance amongst the Jews.

Not a
coward.

Now, it was not fear that brought this leading
Pharisee to seek an interview by night with our
Lord. His outspokenness before the chief priests
and Pharisees later on (vii. 50, 51), and his partici-
pation in the burial of the body of our Lord after
His crucifixion (xix. 39), are not the acts of a man
who was cowed by fear. The plain interpretation
of the narrative seems to be that we have here a

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sincere man, who is influenced by our Lord's signs, **St. John** and who is cautiously feeling his way towards the **iii. 1-16.** truth. Holding the prominent position which he did, it would not be easy for him to speak to our Lord as He taught in the Temple, and therefore the private interview was probably arranged so that he could gain the information which he needed to satisfy the questions which our Lord's signs had roused within him.

The attitude of Nicodemus in the early part of the interview makes this clear. "Rabbi," he says, or "Master"—and the salutation is a striking one coming from a man in Nicodemus's position when addressed to Christ Whom he could only know as a peasant from Galilee—"we know that Thou art come from God as a Teacher (such is the right order of the Greek words), for no man can do these signs that Thou doest, except God be with him." The greeting shows us first of all how the miracles had forced Nicodemus to the conclusion that Christ was in some special way a Messenger from God, though to us there is a feeling of anti-climax in the mere confession of Christ as a Teacher. The salutation, however, reveals to us a sincere man, impressed by what he knew, and seeking cautiously and deliberately to know more. It is in effect an illustration of how our Lord's miracles were producing that Spirit of inquiry which might ultimately be crowned with the full belief in Christ as the Son of God (xx. 31).

To the greeting of this earnest-minded seeker after the truth, our Lord makes a reply which has a

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St. John seeming abruptness about it, *i.e.* "Except a man
iii. 1-16. be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."
A new The seeming abruptness of the reply, however, was
application deliberate, because our Lord desired to bring
of a Nicodemus face to face with the fundamental truth
familiar that a "new birth" is essential for every man
idea. before he can be fit for the kingdom of God. The
 challenge in our Lord's words will be understood
 if we bear in mind certain features of contemporary
 Jewish belief. The idea of a "new birth" in the
 religious sense was very familiar to the Jews of our
 Lord's day, but it had a very limited application.
 It was taught quite generally, that by Baptism,
 Gentile proselytes were "reborn" into the stock
 of Abraham, and that by this means they "began
 a new life" as heirs of the promises made to Abra-
 ham. But it had never entered the minds of the
 Pharisees that a "new birth" of any kind was
 necessary for themselves, and their refusal to be
 baptised by the Forerunner of our Lord was merely
 one illustration of their attitude (St. Luke vii. 30).
 A "new birth" in the ritual sense, therefore, was
 known to the Jews, but it was regarded merely as
 the essential for Gentiles who came into the fold of
 the Jewish theocracy. This it is which makes
 Nicodemus exclaim, "How can a man be born
 when he is old?" it is the cry of a mature Pharisaic
 ritualist who has missed the essential need of Jew
 and Gentile alike, *viz.* a new nature.

To the query of the perplexed Nicodemus our Lord replies, "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of

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God.” The words are an elaboration of the state-**St. John**
 ment contained in verse 3, and they are capable **iii. 1-16.**
 of a double interpretation. In the first place, the
 phrase “born of water” may be a reference to such
 an idea as that found in 2 Esdras viii. 8, where water
 is regarded as part of the creative element in child-
 birth. Hence the expression would simply refer
 to ordinary physical life. The other phrase “born
 of the spirit” refers to the need for a new spiritual
 life obtainable from the Spirit of God.

Looking at the statement in this way, our Lord’s
 words would mean, “Except a man be born
 SPIRITUALLY as well as physically,” or “Except
 a man be born of GOD as well as of man,” he cannot
 enter into the kingdom of God.

The other interpretation would regard the phrase
 “except a man be born of water” as a reference to
 the Jewish rite of Baptism, which symbolised the
 putting away of the old life, whilst “born of the
 Spirit” would refer to the new life from God as
 foretold by the Baptist (i. 33-34).

Both interpretations, however, contain the same **Man’s**
 truth. They both point to the fact that man **need of a**
 needs his nature changed, they assert that man **changed**
 must have not only the ordinary physical and **nature.**
 natural birth, but that he must also be born “from
 above”—as the words “born again” literally
 mean—he must be born not only of man, but he
 must be born of God as well (i. 13).

Such a statement was a complete reversal of
 Jewish ideas. To them a proselyte was “born
 again” when he entered within the kingdom of the

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St. John
iii. 1-16. beliefs and rites of the Jewish faith, the proselyte was "born again" as a result of entering the Jewish fold. But in contradistinction to this, our Lord says that all men, both Jews and Gentiles, must be "born again" BEFORE they can enter His kingdom, they must be "born from above" IN ORDER TO ENTER His kingdom.

Our Lord admits the mystery of such a birth. He declares it is as mysterious as the action of the wind, but He also asserts that the effects of the new birth can be recognised just as readily as the effects of the wind can be. Every "twice-born" man is undoubtedly of an origin unknown in this world, He says, but the results of the "second" birth can be seen just as readily as the effects of the wind can be seen. Some of the old commentators would translate the word "wind" by "Spirit," and the whole passage is then regarded as a comment of our Lord on the mysterious action of the Holy Spirit on the lives of men. The translation of the Authorised and Revised Versions, however, is the more natural one, and the simile would come to our Lord's lips as He and Nicodemus felt the evening breeze blowing upon them as they were no doubt conversing in the open air. The truth remains the same in either case, however, and the truth is the practical reality of the new life which comes to the man "born from above."

All these revelations of the spiritual life strike Nicodemus with bewilderment. He could understand how a Gentile could be "born again" within the Jewish household of faith, the egoism of the

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Jew in the security of the Abrahamic promises was **St. John** satisfied by the thought of the Gentile proselytes **iii. 1-16.** entering upon the promises by the gate of baptism, which symbolised his previous life as unclean. But that God's chosen people must also be "born again" before they could enter into the kingdom of God, was a statement which completely non-plussed him. It was all so different from the life of ceremonial correctness on which the Pharisees relied. There was in Nicodemus, as in most of his fellow-Pharisees, the feeling which prompted a dying Pharisee, conscious of his own correctness in religious observances, to dare the angel of God to keep him out of heaven! It was this which caused the exclamation to burst from Nicodemus, "How can these things be?" for he had been introduced to truths of which he was patently ignorant.

In answer, our Lord unfolds the mystery of the new birth, and His revelation comes in verses 11 to 17. It is sometimes said that our Lord's words stop at verse 15, and that verses 16 to 21 are St. John's words. This may be true in the sense that verses 11 to 15 contain the exact words of Christ, for these were probably written down verbatim by St. John at the time, since he was no doubt present at the interview. Verses 16 to 21 may be the summary of what was said at the time, or a statement of truth which our Lord enunciated at other times. If the latter be the case, then the verses are in the same category as the Epistles of John, they are the proclamation by the disciple of truths which he learned from his Master. But in any case the

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St. John
iii. 1-16.

truths about the new birth remain firm and unquestionable, and these truths resolve themselves into four at least.

The origin
of the
new birth.

(1) First and foremost, the new birth has its origin in the love of God for man, for it is due to the fact that "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son." The "new birth" is not the result of mere human aspiration after better things, for it is of no earthly origin. It has its origin in heaven, and the motive which prompts it is the love of God for sinful humanity. Much might be written to emphasise the wonder of a love so marvellous that it could embrace a world of men such as we know it even to-day. We pride ourselves on our moral and spiritual development, and we complacently look back to a period when men were not so moral and not so virtuous as we deem ourselves to be. We all comfort ourselves at times with such reflections as these. But when we look into our own souls, stripping them of the conventions which hide them from the gaze of others, and when we see ourselves as we really are, we begin to realise a little of what human nature may be. And when we measure ourselves not merely by our own, but by God's standard, we know how we fall short of what He wants and of what He would have us be. Yet it is here that the marvel and the wonder strikes us. It is just this world of sinful men and women like ourselves that God loves. It is for the sake of people like ourselves who have fallen so short of His ideal for mankind that God gave His only begotten Son.

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But surely not because we are sinful does God love **St. John** us ; He loves us rather because of what He wants **iii. 1-16.** us to be. We are potentially His children, and He wants to make us so in reality, and because of this He took the first step to bring it about. Therefore as we reflect upon our need for being "born from above," let it encourage us to know that it was our heavenly Father Who Himself planned the way of supplying our need. It was our heavenly Father Who "was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself," and St. John learned in this interview, as he learned at other times, that "in this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 St. John iv. 9).

(2) But if it was the love of God our Father which **The** prompted Him to send our Lord into the world to **agency of** enable man to be "born again," it is clear from our **the new** Lord's words that the new birth was to be effected **birth.** by means of the Cross. The references to Moses and the serpent in the wilderness were clear enough in their meaning to such a Jew as Nicodemus. They meant at least a life renewed by God to the stricken Israelites. So Christ the Son of Man was to be lifted up on the Cross "that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." It is the crucified Christ Who is the means of securing us the new birth. Without Him we are only "once-born" men and as such we "perish"; but with Him we can be "twice-born" men and can have the spiritual birth which fructifies into the life eternal. And so St. John sees the love

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St. John of God working with our Lord for the regeneration
iii. 1-16. of man. "Herein is love," he says, "not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 St. John iv. 10). It is the love of God in Christ, shown on the Cross of Calvary, which enables man to be "born from above," and St. Paul therefore might well speak of the "Church of God which He had purchased with His own blood" (Acts xx. 28).

**Man's
part in
redemption.**

(3) Yet however great and overwhelming the love of God may be, and though in the Person of our Lord He loved us to the uttermost, even to the death of the Cross, it is quite obvious that man himself must play some part in the scheme of redemption. If sin came by man's disobedience, man's salvation will only come by obedience. And the obedience required is belief in Christ Who died for us. There is an emphatic reiteration of this in verses 15 and 16, and they both point to the essential requirement for the whole of mankind. The "whosoever" in each verse is both inclusive and exclusive. It is "inclusive" in the sense that all mankind may have the "new birth" by belief in the crucified Christ, it is "exclusive" in the sense that apart from belief in the crucified Christ there is no new life. Yet clearly above all else is the essential truth that the love of God in Christ performs all the "doing" on the Cross, and equally clearly is it stated that man's part is belief or faith in Christ Who suffered. Faith accepts the fact of God's gift of Christ, faith accepts Christ's redeeming death on the Cross, faith accepts the fact

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that Christ died for MY sins, for the sins of each one of us. By faith we see, as St. Peter puts it, that Christ "Himself bore our sins in His own body up to the tree" of Calvary (1 Pet. ii. 24), and we know that the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John i. 7). **St. John iii. 1-16.**

(4) Therefore from our "faith in," or "belief in," Christ Who died for us, there comes that for which men have ever craved, and that is "everlasting life." When we ask ourselves how this comes about, we can see certain plain truths which guide us to the answer. We know first of all that our faith in Christ's redeeming death takes away our sins, and because our sins are thus taken away the barrier between us and God is done away with. All that is involved in the word Atonement, all that it sums up in drawing God and man near together, all this we realise by faith in our crucified Redeemer. Belief in Christ therefore means being united to Christ by faith, it means accepting and realising the fact of Redemption for oneself, and then living in constant communion with our Redeemer. Being now united by faith to Christ, it is obvious that there is a completely different outlook on life, and also a new incentive to live in accordance with the ideas of our Master. St. Paul says very truly, "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. v. 17). The apostle to the Gentiles had learned, what St. John brings out so forcibly in his first Epistle, that belief in Christ means living in the light which He sheds

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St. John iii. 1-16. on us. Our earthly frailties may still be there, but He continually cleanses us from them. Our old earthly nature is still there, but He gives us new ideas, new ideals, new standards of conduct, and above all He gives us His strength to enable us to put them into practice. In short it means a new life lived now by the power of Christ; it means that the life "from above" is being lived by us now, a life which will be continued and perfected in heaven. For "we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is . . . eternal life" (1 St. John v. 10).

Thus we sum up some of the wonders of the new birth to which these verses, and the 16th in particular, refer, and we cannot help feeling something of the marvel of the truths involved in our Lord's words. We can well understand the feeling which made Martin Luther declare that St. John iii. 16 is "the Bible in miniature," for it focusses the whole purpose of the Incarnation, and it sums up the way which God planned to call His world back to Himself. There is no subject with which we shall deal in this Gospel which will call for more careful and prayerful consideration than this, for all our hopes of eternity are wrapped up in it. The reader may well ponder it again and again, and by God's help learn by personal experience the blessedness of the "life from above" which God in His love offers us through our Saviour Who died "that we might live through Him."

Before we draw to a close the consideration of our Lord's interview with Nicodemus, there are one or

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two matters of importance to be noted which should not be overlooked. **St. John iii. 1-16.**

The first is in connection with our Lord Himself. The reader cannot but be struck with the fact that our Lord's statements with regard to the "new birth" and all that is involved in it, come at the very beginning of His public ministry. It is at the very outset of His public career that these profound truths are stated. The point which calls for notice, therefore, is that we find no development of doctrine in the case of our Lord, there is no enlargement of His views as He goes on in His ministry, there is nothing which shows that He was slowly learning new ideas about God and eternity. We have here something which completely differentiates our Lord from all other teachers. The views of the latter are always seen to be progressive, they advance from one stage to another, as experience of life and longer study matures their views. But at the very outset of His public ministry our Lord enunciates truths about God and about eternity which are absolute and final. **How our Lord differs from all other teachers.**

Then the incident brings out the importance of the individual in the sight of God. One of the great features of the Gospel is the emphasis which our Lord places upon the individual, and here we have a most striking illustration of this fact. We have seen above that this chapter contains some of the greatest teaching of the Bible, and that the sixteenth verse sums up the greatest of all truths. But the marvel is that such great truths should be unfolded by our Lord, not to huge multitudes of **Importance of the individual.**

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iii. 1-16. people, but to a single individual. It is a great message of comfort and of hope to every individual.

The account of the interview itself, moreover, shows us the need for the re-examination of the religious position of those of us who call ourselves Christians. Is our position as Christians parallel to that of Nicodemus, and are we contenting ourselves simply with Church membership, correct performance of Church duties, and the like? They are important enough in their way, and they may make us very respectable members of society. Yet Nicodemus was all this, and he fell short, because he had missed the essential thing.

And when we ask how the "new birth" is possible, let us never forget the lesson of the first great sign at Cana. He Who showed Himself Master of the world of nature is also Master of human nature. He can change our nature as easily as He changed the water into wine. By His power we can be "born from above," if we will ask Him in penitence and in faith.

Redeemed, restored, forgiven
Through Jesus' precious Blood,
Heirs of His home in Heaven,
O praise our pardoning God!
Praise Him in tuneful measures.
Who gave His Son to die;
Praise Him Whose sevenfold treasures
Enrich and sanctify!

Dear Master, Thine the glory
Of each recovered soul;
Ah! who can tell the story
Of love that made us whole?

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Not ours, not ours the merit;
Be Thine alone the praise,
And ours a thankful spirit
To serve Thee all our days.

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iii. 1-16.

Now keep us, Holy Saviour,
In Thy true love and fear:
And grant us of Thy favour
The grace to persevere:
Till, in Thy new creation,
Earth's time-long travail o'er,
We find our full salvation,
And praise Thee evermore.
(REV. SIR H. W. BAKER.)

PRAYER

Eternal God, Who by Thy holy breath of power makest us a new creation for Thyself, we beseech Thee to preserve what Thou hast created, and consecrate what Thou hast cleansed: that by Thy grace we may be found in that form, the thought of which ever dwells with Thee, and which Thou wilt fulfil in man. *Amen.*—(ROWLAND WILLIAMS.)

XVII

MAN'S JUDGEMENT OF CHRIST, AND GOD'S JUDGEMENT OF MAN

For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world ; but that the world through him might be saved.

He that believeth on him is not condemned : but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.—St. JOHN III. 17-21.

St. John
iii.
17-21.

IF our Lord's interview with Nicodemus revealed one thing more than any other, it was that the coming of Christ was for the benefit of mankind. Redemption, a new birth, eternal life, all this is involved in the coming of our Lord into the world, for the whole purpose of the Incarnation was the salvation of men. We saw how this was clearly set forth in such an epoch-making statement as that of iii. 16, just as we saw it in our examination of i. 10-12. Here, as elsewhere, the Gospels tell us that Christ came into the world for the purpose

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of restoring man to his original greatness as the child of God. **St. John iii.**

This truth, however, is brought forward in verse 17 **17-21.** in order to remove first of all certain misconceptions **Jewish mis-** which were current amongst the Jews. If there **conceptions.** was one thing which the Jews believed with regard to the Messiah, it was that His coming would mean a judgement for the Gentiles. The Messianic prophecies looked forward to a day of Jehovah when the advent of the Messiah would bring judgement on the nations, and the Jews interpreted this to mean that a day of vengeance was coming for the Gentiles, in whose discomfiture the Jews would triumph. Some basis for such views was found in such statements as those in Ps. ii. 7-9 and in Mal. iv. 1, whilst an elaboration of these ideas may be seen in 2 Esdras xv. and xvi. The Jewish conception, in short, was that the coming of the Messiah meant judgement and condemnation for the Gentiles, and the triumph of the Jews. In opposition to such views, therefore, our Lord says that His coming is for the salvation of all men, and that the purpose of the Incarnation is not for the condemnation of Gentiles, but that all men, Jews and Gentiles alike, may realise salvation through Himself.

But though the first word of Christ is the offer of salvation through Himself, there is a condemnation, or a "judgement" as the Revised Version more accurately translates it, always accompanying the revelation made by our Lord.

There is a judgement in the mere need for the Incarnation of our Lord, for it implies that the **The Incarnation itself a judgement.**

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17-21.

world had fallen from its high estate, since it required the intervention in human form of the Son of God. The fact that Christ felt compelled to leave the glory of heaven and come to earth as man, was itself a judgement, for it implied that the world which was made by Christ knew Him not, even though there was in every man something of the light of Christ which lighteth every man coming into the world (i. 9, 10).

St. John's words in verse 18, however, refer to the judgement arising from the fact that men have seen Christ, for it is in accordance with the way that men judge Christ that they themselves are judged. For example, there were men like Peter, and Andrew, and Nathanael who recognised in Christ One Who was not of man but of God. Their association with Him brought them to a full belief in Him as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." There was no "judgement" or "condemnation" for such men. They had used the opportunity which was presented to them of knowing Christ, they had accepted Him as their Messiah, and they believed in His offers of salvation by faith in Him. There was no adverse judgement against them even whilst they were living, and there would also be no future judgement. "He that believeth on Him is not judged" in this life, and though the believer in Christ must stand before the judgement seat of Christ (2 Cor. v. 10), he does not stand there for condemnation (Rom. viii. 1).

And just as it was with those who met our Lord in the flesh, so it is with us who can only

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know Him after the Spirit. We know that His revelation has been for our salvation. It is our condemnation that we, like all humanity, have fallen short of the glory of God, and it is our condemnation that we should need the intervention of Christ and His death on Calvary. But we know that it was the love of God which brought Christ into the world for our salvation, and as we believe in Him and in His redeeming death there is no judgement or condemnation for us now. Nor when we stand before His Judgement-seat later on will there be judgement or condemnation then, but there will be His gracious invitation to inherit the heavenly kingdom which He has prepared for those who trust in Him.

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iii.**

17-21.

St. John's words, however, have in mind not only those who accepted our Lord but also those who rejected Him. There were men like the Scribes and Pharisees, individuals like Herod, and Pilate, and the High Priest, who came face to face with our Lord, and who had opportunities of knowing Him just as the disciples did. Instead of believing in Him, however, they "judged" Him. They judged Him when He cleansed the Temple, or when He healed in the synagogue. They judged Him when He stretched forth His healing hand on the Sabbath, or when He transgressed their petty ritual observances. He was judged when He refused to accommodate Himself to the shallow sensual soul of Herod who set Him at nought. He was judged when He appealed to the truth in the craven self-seeking Pilate and the latter stifled his

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conscience and became a judicial murderer. These and many others judged Christ when His words and actions were calculated to interfere with their selfish interests. But in their judging of Christ, they JUDGED themselves, for "he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the Name of the only begotten Son of God." The future judgement for people such as these is only the conclusion of their own present judgement. If they have refused Christ now, by their very disbelief they have cut themselves off from Him now, and therefore when they stand before Christ at the Judgement seat His words will be simply the echo of their own, "I know you not."

So also with regard to ourselves to-day. We are passing judgement on Christ when His claims are presented to us and we reject Him. We are passing judgement, moreover, when we condemn the things for which He stands, such things as purity, holiness, high ideals of conduct and the like. And as we condemn we are judging Him, and our own condemnation at the Judgement will be but the logical result of our condemnation and judgement of Christ here. This does not rule out the possibility of a change of judgement on our part, and of our accepting Him and thus escaping condemnation. Nor does it involve a condemnation of those who, like Nicodemus, come very slowly to see the light of God in Christ. The plain teaching of St. John's words, however, is that if there is here and now "justification by faith," there is also here and now "condemnation by unbelief." We are

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reminded that we can assure our future by faith **St. John**
in Christ now, or we may prepare ourselves for **iii.**

condemnation and judgement by our refusal to **17-21.**

believe now "in the name of the only begotten Son of God." The deliberate unbeliever has no need to wait for a future judgement, "he hath been judged already" because "he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son" (1 St. John v. 10).

The same truth is emphasised by St. John when he goes on to consider the cause for the adverse judgement which some men pass upon Christ. "This is the judgement," he says, and he is referring not to the final judgement but to the process of judgement which is going on day by day, "that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light: for their works were evil." The truth involved in this statement is **The love of darkness.** that the deliberate rejection of Christ can only come from hatred of the Light of God; it can only come, in short, from hatred for all that God stands for. For example, the constant criticism of goodness, of purity and of truth or a deliberate acquiescence in a low standard of morality, produces a frame of mind which is averse from Christ (cf. vii. 7). Moreover, the more a man allows himself to be controlled by sin, the more does he look upon sin as a natural thing, and the more does he condone it both in himself and in others. And just in proportion as he so continues, does he place himself in opposition to all that is "of good report." Men begin by condoning sin, they go on to love sin, and then they degenerate into hating that which is

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17-21.

holy. So the process of judgement goes on day by day, slowly hardening into aversion from all that our Christian faith stands for. It results in what St. John calls "loving darkness," for such a life is lived in the "darkness" of sin, and unless there is repentance it can only result at last in "outer darkness." A deliberate sinner of this type therefore continually passes judgement on himself now, a judgement which will be duly ratified by God later on (St. Matt. viii. 12). Hence when men have Christ's life and offers placed before them, and when they deliberately reject Him because of their sinful lives, it means that they have already judged themselves, and that they are preparing a judgement which God Himself will register at the Judgement.

A truth such as this is not very palatable in these complacent days. Men have so continually dwelt upon the Fatherhood of God, and the Love of God, and they have so emphasised the Parable of the Prodigal Son that they have overlooked the sterner side of Christ's message, just as they have overlooked the natural working of God's laws even in this life. But the truth remains, however much men may wish to blind themselves to actualities, and the solemn truth involved in the rejection of Christ cannot be obscured by any sophistries.

Yet the last word of the Gospel is always one of mercy and of love, and so it is here. "He that doeth truth cometh to the light," says St. John, and the symbolism is apparent. The "light" refers back to Christ, and the sentence therefore

Man's Judgement of Christ

means that the man who is striving after a true and **St. John** upright life will never be afraid of the "light" of **iii.** Christ. It is not that such a man will be pre-**17-21.** sumptuous, nor will he have any Pharisaic feelings of self-satisfaction because of the outward correctness of his life, for he will know that "all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God." But "he that doeth truth" in the general sense of the term will always be attracted to the light of Christ, and "he that doeth truth" in the Christian sense will know that he "does truth" because his actions "are wrought in God"; they are the result of his union with Christ.

It is in the last truth that everything rests. Belief in Christ, redemption, being born from above—these are the guarantee that the actions of the believer will stand the searchlight of God. We may fail sometimes, but the remedy is ever there in our Master with His promises to cleanse us continually in this life (1 St. John i. 5-7), and to present us later on "without blemish" before the throne of God (Jude v. 24). In this way we shall "not be ashamed before Him at His coming" (1 St. John ii. 28).

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, in Whose hands lie the eternal destinies of men, be pleased to guide my feet along the pathway which leads to eternity with Thee: Quicken in me an earnest desire to be a faithful follower of Thee: Enable me by Thy Spirit cheerfully to do the things which Thou hast commanded: Strengthen me by Thy grace to live ever according to Thy will, so that when this life is ended I may receive the promise of eternal inheritance with Thee: for Thy Name's sake. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XVIII

THE FINAL TESTIMONY OF THE BAPTIST

After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judæa ; and there he tarried with them, and baptised.

And John also was baptising in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there : and they came, and were baptised. For John was not yet cast into prison.

Then there arose a question between *some* of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptiseth, and all *men* come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom : but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice : this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I *must* decrease. He that cometh from above is above all : he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth : he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth ; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God : for God giveth not the Spirit by measure *unto him*. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life : and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life ; but the wrath of God abideth on him.—ST. JOHN III. 22-36.

St. John
iii.
22-36.

JOHN the Baptist appears in this Gospel with one purpose only, and that is that he may give his testimony to Christ. There is nothing in St. John's

The Final Testimony of the Baptist

Gospel of his outspoken utterances on the banks of St. John the Jordan as in St. Matthew iii. and St. Luke iii., iii. and there is nothing of his bold rebuke of the 22-36. licentiousness of Herod as in St. Mark vi. St. John introduces him only to show his testimony to Christ as the Messiah and as the Son of God who should come into the world. This is the purport of the references to the Baptist at the opening of our Lord's ministry (i. 6-8; i. 15-28), and it is the same purport here before the Forerunner passes from view.

It is clear, moreover, that St. John is supplementing St. John what is found in the other Gospels. If we read the and the first three Gospels we are led to believe that our Synoptists. Lord's ministry only began when the Baptist had been cast into prison (cf. St. Matt. iv. 12). The first three chapters of St. John's Gospel, however, show us that our Lord was at work before the Baptist's imprisonment took place, for we can see that He had been at work in Galilee amongst His own friends and neighbours, and that afterwards He had gone up to Jerusalem. It is another illustration, therefore, of the way in which St. John uses the information he has about his Master's doings in order to bring out the great truth of Christ's Divinity which is ever in his mind, and which it is his purpose to get others to believe.

We are thus told by St. John that for a time our The Lord and the Baptist were engaged in their work Baptist's work simultaneously. The Baptist still continued to work continued. preach of the Messiah who had now come, and he still continued to baptise (v. 23), whilst at the same

The Gospel According to St. John

St. John time Christ Himself was teaching and His disciples
iii. were baptising. The unfavourable reception with
22-36. which our Lord met in Jerusalem, where, with the
exception of Nicodemus and the doubtful adherence
of some Passover pilgrims (ii. 23-25), His mission
met with no success, caused His withdrawal to the
country districts of Judæa. At this time the
Baptist was at Ænon, near Salem, a place probably
on the borders of Samaria and Galilee, and near the
residence of Herod Antipas, who was soon to put
John to death.

It was while both our Lord and the Baptist were
at work in these different country districts, that the
question of the relationship between them was
raised. The matter cropped up through the query
of an unknown Jew (R.V., v. 23), who questioned
John's disciples about the connection between their
master and Christ. This "Jew" had evidently
come into contact with both parties, he had heard
both of them preaching "Repentance" (cf. St. Matt.
iii. 2 ; iv. 17), he had seen men being baptised by
both of them, and he wanted to know what relation,
if any, there was between them. Feeling evidently
became very strong on the matter. The word which
is translated "question" in verse 25 really means
"a disputing," and a better idea of the force of the
word is obtained in Acts xv. 2, where the same word
is used to denote the fierce contention which arose
at Antioch over the question of Circumcision. It
is clear, therefore, that it was no mere academic
discussion which took place between John's disciples
and the unknown Jew. It is possible that the

The Final Testimony of the Baptist

latter was a disciple of Christ and in his enthusiasm **St. John** for his Master had spoken disparagingly of the work **iii.** of the Forerunner, but whatever the line of his **22-36.** observations may have been, there is no doubt that feeling ran very high.

It is with something of righteous indignation, **Indignation** therefore, that the disciples of the Baptist return **of John's** to their master, and they burst out with the cry, **disciples.** "Rabbi, He that was with thee beyond Jordan, to Whom thou barest witness, behold the same baptiseth, and all men come to Him." It is as though they said, "Master, here is the One for Whom you have worked, the One to Whom you have continually given testimony, and the One for Whom you have given your whole life; here He is preaching and teaching, and everybody flocks to Him." There is an obvious exaggeration in their assertion "all men come to Him," because it was contradicted by the events in Jerusalem, and verse 32, moreover, is a reminder of the limited number of those who had actually accepted Christ. But the disciples looked back to the sensation caused by the first preaching of the Baptist, they thought of the crowds on the banks of the Jordan, and they remembered the stir with which Palestine had received John's preaching. Their master had then been the centre of all eyes, but now they saw his influence waning, they knew that men were going to the new Teacher, and it seemed monstrous to them that the Baptist, who had, they thought, done all the spade work, should be falling into oblivion, and that Christ should apparently be

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St. John
iii.
22-36.

reaping all the benefit. They had evidently lost sight of the purport of the Baptist's message, and they had completely failed to understand his position as the Forerunner. What they saw was that their teacher was losing ground in comparison with Christ, they were roused to bitterness by the dispute with the Jew, and their cry to the Baptist was the cry of faithful, if short-sighted, scholars, jealous for the reputation and honour of their own master.

The
Baptist's
reply.

John's reply, however, recalled his followers to the burden of his message from the beginning. He reminded them that Christ could not have the success which was evidently attending His ministry in the country districts of Judea unless it were "given Him from heaven" (*v.* 27), and he reminded them of his own continual testimony to Christ to which they themselves had referred (*i.* 19-36). They had obviously overlooked the significance of the Baptist's statements, but their master had not forgotten, and he had faced the consequences for himself. The success of our Lord was no occasion for sorrow for the Baptist. He likened himself to the friend of a bridegroom who makes all the arrangements for the wedding contract and the wedding feast, and who rejoices when the bridegroom has been formally united to his bride and when they come to the feast. Steeped as he was in Isaiah's Messianic prophecies with their similes of God being united in marriage with His people (*cf.* *Isa.* *liv.* 5; *lxii.* 5), John saw the old relationship of Jehovah married to Israel reproduced in the new relationship of Christ married to His followers

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(cf. 2 Cor. xi. 2). He rejoiced, therefore, that he had **St. John** been permitted as the friend of the Bridegroom to **iii.** bring about such a union. There was nothing for **22-36.** sorrow or indignation in this, but just the reverse, because the whole purpose of his life was crowned by the success of Christ. The favourable reception given to our Lord was in itself a direct testimony to the Baptist's own preliminary work, and John's "joy was therefore fulfilled" in Christ's success.

Moreover, the Baptist had obviously faced the "He must matter very thoroughly. He says in effect that **increase."** Christ and His Forerunner may still go on working side by side for a time, but that the longer they go on the greater will Christ's success be, and the less will the Forerunner be. "He must increase" as the days go on, "but I must decrease" as the result of His increase; but the joy of John is all the greater as Christ becomes magnified. The Baptist's reply to his disciples, therefore, is a striking testimony to his own sterling character as well as a testimony to Christ. A smaller-minded man would have found no joy in his own eclipse, but the faithful Forerunner remains constant to the Master Whose herald he was, and he finds his own satisfaction in the increasing glory of Christ.

Having thus met the querulous outburst of his **The** disciples by his true-spirited recognition of his own **difference** subordination, the Baptist goes on further to show **between** the vital difference between Christ's ministry and **the two** his own. It is sometimes urged that what follows **ministries.** in verses 31 to 36 are the reflections of the Evangelist rather than the actual words of the Baptist. It is

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St. John
iii.

22-36.

true that the phraseology is that of St. John, but there is no reason for doubting that the ideas are those of the Baptist. His own witness to Christ, referred to in i. 29-36, was a witness to Christ's Divinity, even though he may not have realised then all that was summed up in his witness. He could learn, however, as the disciples of Christ learned. There is every probability that John's former disciples, such as Andrew and Peter, who now followed Christ, would occasionally see their old master and would tell him something of our Lord's teaching, such as that unfolded to Nicodemus. The reference in verse 29 to the friend of the bridegroom hearing the voice of the bridegroom, may well imply that John had heard directly or indirectly from Christ truths which had filled him with joy. There is no inherent probability, therefore, but that these verses do contain a summary of the actual testimony of the Baptist himself. He had acclaimed the success of our Lord's ministry in verses 27-30; now he will explain to his followers the fundamental distinction between Christ's work and his own.

The Baptist goes straight to the point by pointing out that the difference between himself and Christ is the difference between what is earthly and what is heavenly. Whatever heavenly inspiration John may have had to enable him to be a witness to the Light (i. 6-8), he knew that he was earthly in origin and limited in every way because of it. On the other hand, he declares that Christ comes from heaven. Just as our Lord declared in His inter-

The Final Testimony of the Baptist

view with Nicodemus (iii. 11-13), and just as St. John John stated in the prologue (i. 18), so the Baptist iii. can say now. Christ is from heaven and therefore 22-36.

He can speak of heaven as One Who is acquainted with it. As the marginal reading of the Revised Version puts it, "He that cometh from heaven beareth witness of what He hath seen and heard," and hence when Christ speaks of heavenly things He speaks of things natural to Himself, He simply tells what He knows.

But the Baptist goes further. Heaven is the abode of Christ, it is true, but even admitting this, it would make Christ no more than a heavenly visitant to earth. In this He would be immeasurably better equipped for God's work than the Baptist, in that He could testify of God and of heaven from an acquaintance which no mere man could have. The Baptist, however, sees further than this. He knows that Christ speaks the words of God as the Messenger of God, but He is not simply a heavenly Teacher. He is the One by Whom all the authority of God is wielded, since the Father "hath given all things into His hand" (cf. St. Matt. xi. 27), and the "all things" include the eternal destiny of all mankind. What the Fore-runner by Divine insight now sees is that the man who receives Christ's testimony about Himself gives his assent to the fact that God is acting in the Person of Christ, and that God and Christ are One. The man, therefore, who believes in Christ, believes in God, and because he believes in God he already enters on the possession of everlasting life,

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St. John
iii.
22-36.

since eternal life is a life lived "in Christ" or "in God." But the man who refuses to believe in Christ, refuses belief in God, and for such a man there is no eternal life in the presence of God, but only a life sundered from Him in Whom he will not believe (cf. Rom. i. 18). All that we have considered in verses 1 to 21 of this third chapter is really summed up in this testimony of the Baptist. All these truths were put before us in our Lord's interview with Nicodemus, but the striking thing is that thus early the Baptist had seized upon the essential things involved in Christ's Divinity.

For the Baptist, therefore, it was not hard to rebut the criticisms of his followers about Christ. It was not for the creature to measure himself with the Creator, and it was not for man to put himself against God. But close adherence to his own God-given message had slowly taught him what was involved in the Divinity of Christ, and when the occasion arose for him to speak, his witness was faithful to the new truth he had learned, just as he had been faithful to the Coming One Whom he had preached on the Jordan.

Thus what began as a mere "disputation" on the part of John's hot-tempered and jealous followers ended in the greatest testimony yet seen to all that is involved in belief in Christ. The Baptist passes from the pages of this Gospel, but not before he had given complete testimony to his Master.

The
challenge
to our-
selves.

The incident is not one which can be repeated, for there is little likelihood of any Christian teacher being confused with Christ in the minds of men

The Final Testimony of the Baptist

to-day. But the consideration of the final testi- **St. John**
mony of the Baptist, and our reflection upon the **iii.**
circumstances attending his last witness to his **22-36.**
Master, may well call each one of us to greater
devotion to our Lord and Saviour. If His service
should mean the loss of personal or social influence,
are we prepared to face it? If a clear witness to
all that He means for us will bring with it the
narrowing of our earthly interest, are we ready to
give that witness?

We can face such a challenge only if we have
realised with the Baptist the meaning of the present
possession of "everlasting life" (v. 36), for it is in
the realisation of our "life in Christ" that we can
"count all things but loss for the excellency of the
knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord" (Phil. iii. 8).

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who callest us to be Thy disciples,
and Who dost equip us with strength to follow Thee; Be
pleased by Thy Spirit to make us more faithful in our
witness to Thee: Make clear to us what is involved in our
belief in Thee: Show us that in our knowledge of Thee
we are beginning the life of heaven even now on earth:
Open Thou our eyes that we may see the wondrous things
of God, and give us grace that we may try to bring them
to pass on earth: Forgive our unfaithfulness and short-
comings, and endue us with Thy continual Presence that
we may ever witness faithfully for Thee, until the day
comes when we shall see Thee in Thy unveiled Presence.
We ask it for Thy Name's sake. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XIX

OUR LORD'S INTERVIEW WITH THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptised more disciples than John, (Though Jesus himself baptised not, but his disciples,) He left Judæa, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with *his* journey, sat thus on the well: *and* it was about the sixth hour. There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water: Jesus saith unto her, Give me to drink. (For his disciples were gone away unto the city to buy meat.) Then saith the woman of Samaria unto him, How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? Art thou greater than our father Jacob, which gave us the well, and drank thereof himself, and his children, and his cattle? Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life. The woman saith unto him, Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw. Jesus saith unto her, Go, call thy husband, and come hither. The woman answered and said, I have no husband. Jesus

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said unto her, Thou hast well said, I have no husband : For thou hast had five husbands ; and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband : in that saidst thou truly. The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain ; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what : we know what we worship : for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God *is* a Spirit : and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth. The woman saith unto him, I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ : when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith unto her, I that speak unto thee am *he*.

And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman : yet no man said, What seekest thou ? or, Why talkest thou with her ? The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did : is not this the Christ ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto him.

In the mean while his disciples prayed him, saying, Master, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not of. Therefore said the disciples one to another, Hath any man brought him *ought* to eat ? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and *then* cometh harvest ? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields ; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal : that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labour : other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did. So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them : and he abode there two days. And many more believed because of his

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own word; And said unto the woman, Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard *him* ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.—
ST. JOHN IV. 1-42.

St. John AFTER the cleansing of the Temple and the interview
iv. 1-42. with Nicodemus, our Lord spent about six months itinerating in the country districts of Judæa. The opposition of the Pharisees, however, became more pronounced as time went on, and in order to pursue His work without molestation our Lord determined to withdraw from Judæa into the more secluded districts of Galilee. The direct way from Judæa into Galilee lay through Samaria, and this was the way by which the caravan route ran through the country. The Jews as a rule avoided Samaria in travelling between Judæa and Galilee, and the reasons for so doing will be mentioned below. The common practice was to make the long detour through the district of Perea rather than go through Samaria, but in opposition to the usual custom our Lord went direct through Samaria, where He came face to face with the Samaritan Woman by the well of Sychar. It is impossible for us to examine in detail every verse of the remarkable interview which took place between Christ and this woman, but there are certain outstanding features which call for special consideration.

A deliberate purpose. In the first place, the interview forms a striking illustration of the truth that the revelation of God's love for man was given not simply for the Jews, but for the whole world. St. John himself sees something of the deliberateness of Christ's

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journey into Samaria when he says that "He must **St. John**
needs go through Samaria" (v. 4). He sees some **iv. 1-42.**
express purpose in the fact that his Master avoided
the long journey round Perea and deliberately
went through Samaria. He knew sufficient of our
Lord's general methods of work to know that Christ
kept back His disciples from working amongst
anybody except among Jews. His disciples were
ordered not to go "into the way of the Gentiles"
and were forbidden to enter "into any city of the
Samaritans" (St. Matt. x. 5), whilst our Lord Him-
self declared that He was "not sent but unto the
lost sheep of the house of Israel" (St. Matt. xv. 24).
We who have the whole of our Lord's revelation
before us, can understand the significance of His
restrictive orders to His disciples at that time, just
as the disciples themselves did later on. We can
see that Christ's revelation of Himself to the Jews
was given so that through the Jews all the world
should know of Him. Christ's revelation of Him-
self to the Jews was on a par with God's revelation
of Himself to Abraham (Gen. xii. 3). The latter's
knowledge of God was to bring a blessing "to all
the families of the earth," and so in the same way
Christ's plan was to create a body of followers from
the Jews through whom the message of God's love
should spread to the whole world. But whilst
His purpose for the world was to be accomplished
through a band of Jews chosen and trained for this
purpose, our Lord in His interview with the
Samaritan woman steps aside, both literally as well
as metaphorically, in order to show His love for

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St. John the world outside His own people the Jews. The
iv. 1-42. action of Christ in deliberately arranging His journey
The Jews for the purpose of this interview, is all the more
and the remarkable when we remember the general attitude
Samaritans. of the Jews to the Samaritans. The Romans
might be hated and feared by the Jews, but the Samaritans were hated and loathed and despised by them. It was one of those national hatreds, not unknown in Europe to-day, a hatred fed and inflamed by long years of mutual suspicion and mutual abuse. This national antipathy had its origin in what was a period of shame to the Jews. The Samaritans were the descendants of the colonists brought by Sargon from the neighbourhood of Babylon to dwell in the homes of the ten tribes he had carried into captivity, and who had intermarried with the Jews left behind (2 Kings xvii. 24 ; xviii. 11). The presence of the Samaritans was thus a constant reminder of a period of national degradation, and any form of intercourse was resented by the Jews when they returned from exile. The Jews refused their proffered help when rebuilding the Temple (Ezra iv.), and by the time of our Lord's ministry the feeling had become so bad that the Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogues, and they were barred from every legal and religious privilege. The Jews might compass sea and land to make a convert from other nations (St. Matt. xxiii. 15), but they rejected with disdain any possible proselytes from among the Samaritans. A fierce hatred and contempt of this sort naturally bred similar feelings in return, and it is not sur-

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prising to learn that the Samaritans at one time **St. John** broke into the Temple and defiled it by scattering **iv. 1-42.** dead men's bones in it, and it is easy to understand why they waylaid and robbed pilgrims going to Jerusalem. Such was the mutual attitude of these two peoples at the time of our Lord's public ministry. We can understand, therefore, why the greatest abuse which the Jews could shower on Christ was to declare that He was a Samaritan (viii. 48), and it is quite probable that our Lord's command to the disciples that they should not go to the Samaritans was due simply to the fact that they were as yet imbued with the ordinary Jewish feelings towards the Samaritans.

All this is summed up in St. John's phrase, "He must needs go through Samaria." The Apostle felt that his Master was of set purpose giving a demonstration to His disciples of His attitude towards the despised Samaritans.

Hence it is that a feeling of surprise is noticeable **Surprise at** in all those concerned in the narrative. The **Christ's** woman herself cannot understand why our Lord **action.** should ask drink from a Samaritan since "the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans" (v. 9). The disciples themselves when they returned from purchasing food are amazed, and "marvelled that He talked with the woman" (v. 27). They all cannot understand why Christ should thus flout the ordinary Jewish opinion of their hated neighbours. But if our Lord never left the shores of Palestine to evangelise the world, He taught His followers the all-embracing character of His love. And He

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St. John used the despised Samaritans to illustrate this truth.
iv. 1-42. He told the parable of the Good Samaritan to show the contrast between him and the unmerciful Jews (St. Luke x. 25-37), He emphasised the difference between the thankful Samaritan leper and the nine unthankful lepers of the chosen people (St. Luke xvii. 6), and when His last command was given it was that His followers should take the story of His redeeming love to the Samaritans (Acts i. 8). In no way could Christ have shown more forcibly that He was the Saviour of all men than by His whole attitude to those whom the Jews would not even regard as a nation at all (Ecclus. i. 25, 26).

From the lips of our Lord, therefore, the Samaritans learned this great truth. They learned for themselves that Christ was indeed "the Saviour of the world" (v. 42). The truth, which the Apostles themselves only grasped after much heart burning and after bitter discussion, was taught and learned by the well of Sychar. St. John himself came to realise it later (1 John iv. 14), just as fully as St. Paul did (1 Tim. iv. 10), but the lesson was taught to all men in this interview with the Samaritan woman.

**Attitude
towards
women.**

Then, again, this interview paved the way for a revolution in the attitude of the world towards women. In the Roman world of that time a husband had absolute power over his wife. This was a remnant of the old patriarchal laws which gave the head of the family power of life and death over every one connected with him. Thus we read that the wife of Aulus Plautius, one of the Roman generals who conquered Britain, was accused of

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“a foreign superstition.” This accusation evidently meant that she was suspected of being a Christian, but the accusation was legally investigated by her husband, because he had the power of life and death over his wife. Moreover, women were regarded by the Romans as a mere plaything. A wife could be repudiated if she was seen out-of-doors without her head covered, and this being so, we can understand what is involved in the statement made by Seneca that a certain man had been “married a thousand times.” If the position of woman was thus low amongst the Romans, we are not surprised to find that she had an equally despicable position amongst the Jews. Polygamy was quite common in the time of our Lord, though the Rabbis condemned the practice. A woman also might be divorced for many trivial things. If she appeared in public with dishevelled hair, if she broke a vow, or if she was in the habit of conversing with men, these and many other such reasons were good enough subterfuges for a divorce “if she found no favour in his eyes.” And if this was the attitude of the ordinary man, the teaching of the Rabbis was little better. They declared that “he who instructs his daughter in the law, is as one who plays the fool,” and they asserted that it was better to burn the precepts of the law than to teach them to a woman. Among the Samaritans also women held a similarly degraded position, though the facilities for divorce are said to have been fewer among the Samaritans than among the Jews.

St. John
iv. 1-42.

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St. John Bearing these facts in mind it is quite possible
iv. 1-42. that the Samaritan woman with her five husbands (v. 18) may have been more sinned against than sinning. But the prevailing low estimate of the times with regard to women is reflected in her dealings with Christ. She cannot understand why any one, and more especially a Jew, can ask "drink of me which am a woman of Samaria?" (v. 9). The emphatic note in her query is on the word WOMAN. She says in effect, "how can any man, and a man moreover who is a Jew, condescend to demean himself by making request from me, a woman, and a woman of Samaria to boot?" It is a testimony to the very low estimate which she puts upon herself. But the disciples also bear witness to the same astonishment as that shown by the woman. When they return from purchasing food at Sychar they were amazed to find their Master in conversation with a woman, they "marvelled," we are told, "that He talked with a woman" (v. 27, R.V.). The disciples had just as low an estimate of women as the Samaritan woman had of herself, and they were filled with amazement that Christ should outrage all the known sentiment of the time, and talk thus publicly with a woman.

Our Lord's estimate of woman, however, is seen in His whole attitude throughout the incident, in which He treated the Samaritan woman with as much consideration as He had shown to the Pharisee Nicodemus. But the climax comes in verse 26, where we find that our Lord made the first clear revelation of Himself as the Messiah, to this despised

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woman of Samaria. Hitherto Christ had spoken **St. John** of Himself indirectly. Twice He had referred to **iv. 1-42.** Himself as the Son of Man (i. 51 ; iii. 13), and on two occasions there had been reference to God as His Father or to Himself as the Son of God (ii. 16 ; iii. 16), but the full revelation of Himself as the Messiah was made now to a woman.

From this point of view, therefore, the interview is very significant. Women were to become the most faithful disciples of Christ. They shared His teaching and His healing, they followed Him to minister to Him of their substance, and they proved more reliable than men when the hour of trial came. When "all the disciples forsook Him and fled" the women never deserted Him, for they were faithful even when He hung on the Cross. They were first at the sepulchre, they were the first to receive the greeting of their risen Master, and they very rightly were amongst those who first received His Spirit. The Christian Church may well be proud of her women, and women in their turn may well thank Christ for all that He has done for them, not only for the next world, but for this world as well. But the first step in the emancipation of women must be traced back to the incident at the well of Sychar, when our Lord showed that in Him "there is neither male nor female," but all are one in Christ (Gal. iii. 28).

This leads us on to examine the particular way in **Method of** which our Lord dealt with the Samaritan woman **Christ's** when He was trying to bring her from the darkness **treatment.** of sin into the light of the knowledge of Himself.

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St. John His treatment of her is in some ways very different
iv. 1-42. from the method employed by Him in his talk with Nicodemus. The latter had come deliberately to discover what he could from Christ, and our Lord therefore proceeded at once to the fundamental necessities of human nature, and showed how those necessities could be met in Himself. The Samaritan woman, however, was no inquirer like Nicodemus, but a casual stranger, and it is very significant to see how our Lord first wins the sympathy of the woman, and then deliberately advances step by step until the woman's spiritual desires are roused and met by belief in Christ.

Creating
the right
atmosphere.

The first purpose of Christ was to secure a sympathetic hearing from the woman, and this was done by the perfectly natural method of asking her for a drink from her waterpot (v. 6). Bearing in mind what was mentioned above about the mutual hatred between Jews and Samaritans, we can understand how this simple request of Christ would astonish the woman. The latter would know from certain peculiarities of dress that our Lord was a Jew, and His speech would indicate the same thing. The mere fact, therefore, that a Jew should speak to a Samaritan, and that He should speak to "a WOMAN of Samaria," strikes her with amazement (v. 9). She knew something of the Jewish teaching which declared that whoever received a Samaritan into his house and entertained him, deserved to have his children driven into exile, and she no doubt had experienced often enough some of that anger which impelled even the disciples of Christ

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to wish to see Samaritans scorched with lightning from heaven (St. Luke ix. 51-56). But when this Jewish Stranger broke through the barriers of national hatred, and when He even condescended to make a request from a woman of the hated race, the natural feelings of hostility were repelled. It was not merely courtesy, but it was the direct appeal to the heart or to the emotions which created the right atmosphere in which the conversation might be pursued further. The right atmosphere having been created, our Lord then attracts the attention of the woman by His reference to the "gift of God" and the "living water" (v. 10). We can see how the mind of the woman is at work in her endeavour to realise the relation between the well water and the "living water" which the stranger connected with God. Natural curiosity, national pride in Jacob's well, we see these at work as our Lord thus stimulates the woman's mind, drawing her on to higher things (vv. 10-15). But when the appeal to the mind of the Samaritan woman has prepared her for spiritual truths, we then see how Christ concentrates on stimulating the soul of the woman. Yet before the soul of the woman can be satisfied there is a side of her life which must be cleansed. The simple words, "Go, call thy husband, and come hither" (v. 16), touched a dark spot in that women's life (v. 18), but there was no ruthless condemnation on the part of our Lord. Yet whatever excuse we may make for her, and no doubt there was plenty of excuse if we bear in mind the conditions under which the women of that day

St. John
iv. 1-42.

Appeal
to the
conscience.

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St. John lived, she feels her own need as Christ thus speaks
iv. 1-42. to her. She feels the claims of God upon her, and the words of verses 19 and 20 are the simple gropings of an awakened conscience seeking for light. The revelation of her own shortcomings is made very clear to her, as our Lord appeals to her conscience.

And when her conscience has been roused, then Christ appeals to her soul. All the pent-up longings of the woman after the better life, which were summed up in her desire for "living water" and for the right worship of God, are met by Christ's statement about true worship (*vv.* 21-24). She feels that our Lord has stated for her what are the aspirations of both Jews and Samaritans, and she has sufficient knowledge of the Samaritan scriptures to know that such aspirations were to have their fulfilment in the Messiah (*v.* 25). And it is then, when the deep-seated aspirations after God which Christ had roused from sleep, were wrung from the lips of the woman, that Christ revealed Himself to her as the Messiah for Whom her better self was waiting.

Viewed from this point of view, therefore, the interview is a very striking psychological study, as Christ appeals to the heart and mind and conscience and soul. It shows how Christ can meet the whole being of man, just as it shows how He can sympathetically draw us on from a lower to a higher life. Our Lord's treatment of the woman is not without its lessons for all Christian workers who are trying to win people for Christ, for the logical advance from one point to another shows a definite

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method on the part of Christ in winning this woman. **St. John**
But, above all, the interview teaches us something **iv. 1-42.**
of the loving tenderness and patience with which
our Master guides this ignorant and despised
woman, directing her feeble aspirations after God
until they find their satisfaction in the knowledge
of Himself.

There are two other points which must not be
overlooked. One is, that our Lord should have
condescended to give an interview to an individual,
and to such an individual as the woman of Samaria.
But St. John's Gospel tells us of many interviews
on the part of men and women with Christ. The
first two disciples, Nathanael, Nicodemus, the noble-
man—these are but a few of the many interviews
recorded. They are men of such different tempera-
ments and differing circumstances. They include
the humble fishermen and the nobleman who
served the King, the thoughtful Nathanael and the
simple man cured of blindness; they are people of
very varying types. But their need is the same.
Their pent-up longings are expressed by the cries,
“We know that Thou art a Teacher come from
God,” “If Thou be the Christ, tell us,” and they
come and interview Christ hoping that their long-
ings may be satisfied by Him. And it is to such
individuals that our Lord gave His most precious
words. Those words no doubt were also spoken to
larger numbers of people, but they were given to
individuals, and it is not without significance that
the Biblical record of them is that they were spoken
to individuals. Thus it is that we have the greatest

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St. John truth in the Bible given to one man, Nicodemus
iv. 1-42. (iii. 16), and thus it is that we have the first revelation of Christ as the Messiah given to an individual (iv. 26). It is as individuals we cry to God, and it is to us as individuals that Christ gives us His promises.

The other truth is brought out by the action of the Samaritan woman in going to Sychar to reveal to her friends what she had learned from Christ (vv. 28, 29). From her own experience the woman roused the interest of her neighbours, so that they came to find out the truth for themselves. And in the presence of Christ, the people of Sychar learned that He was indeed their Saviour, the Saviour of the despised Samaritans, for He was the Saviour of the whole world (v. 42).

It teaches us the practical lesson of the duty and responsibility that lies upon us who have learned to know Christ as our Saviour. In this world God works through His people, and it is only as Christian people live for Him and work for Him that His Name can be known. It is only as we do our share in revealing the love of God in Christ that we can honestly look forward to the time "when the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who by the well of Sychar didst reveal Thyself to the despised woman of Samaria, we pray Thee that we may learn of Thee as that poor woman did : May we ever be assured that Thy love is freely offered

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to all of us, however mean we may appear in the eyes of **St. John** men ; Teach us, as Thou didst teach her, to see ourselves **iv. 1-42.** as we really are in Thy sight ; Grant us a fuller revelation of Thyself in all Thy love and tenderness for us ; and give us the grace to make known to others all that Thy love means to us ; We ask it for Thy Name's sake. *Amen.*—
(T. W. G.)

XX

THE HEALING OF THE
NOBLEMAN'S SON

Now after two days he departed thence, and went into Galilee. For Jesus himself testified, that a prophet hath no honour in his own country. Then when he was come into Galilee, the Galilæans received him, having seen all the things that he did at Jerusalem at the feast : for they also went unto the feast. So Jesus came again into Cana of Galilee, where he made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman, whose son was sick at Capernaum. When he heard that Jesus was come out of Judæa into Galilee, he went unto him, and besought him that he would come down, and heal his son : for he was at the point of death. Then said Jesus unto him, Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe. The nobleman saith unto him, Sir, come down ere my child die. Jesus saith unto him, Go thy way ; thy son liveth. And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him, and told *him*, saying, Thy son liveth. Then enquired he of them the hour when he began to amend. And they said unto him, Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him. So the father knew that *it was* at the same hour, in the which Jesus said unto him, Thy son liveth : and himself believed, and his whole house. This *is* again the second miracle *that* Jesus did, when he was come out of Judæa into Galilee.—ST. JOHN IV. 43-54.

St. John OUR Lord's withdrawal from Judæa into Galilee
iv. 43-54. had been hastened by the increasing hostility of the Pharisees. The latter had been very much opposed to the Baptist, and part of their opposition was

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transferred to Christ when John proclaimed Him as **St. John** the Messiah. The bitterness of the opposition had **iv. 43-54.** not reached the intensity which it did later, but it was evidently becoming very marked. A reflection of the situation is seen in St. John's reiteration about our Lord's withdrawal into Galilee. He refers to the withdrawal in iv. 1-3, and mentions it again three times in the last part of the chapter, *i.e.* in verses 43, 47, 54. St. John seems to be pointing out that a critical moment had arrived, and that our Lord had therefore determined on the policy of withdrawing from Judæa, and of making Galilee the scene of His labours. At the moment, the Baptist was not yet cast into prison (iii. 24), but that event was evidently not far distant.

Our Lord's journey to Galilee had been delayed two days in Samaria (*vv.* 40, 43), owing to the urgent wish of the Samaritans at Sychar, but after this interruption He went straight to Cana of Galilee.

It may seem somewhat strange to find St. John **Christ's visit to Galilee.** saying that Christ "went into Galilee, for Jesus Himself testified that a prophet hath no honour in his own country" (*v.* 44). There seems a contradiction in the statement, since our Lord was brought up in Galilee. There are two possible explanations of this apparent contradiction. Judæa itself may be regarded as our Lord's own country, for it contained His birthplace at Bethlehem, it held His "Father's house" in Jerusalem, it was the home of the prophets, and it held the city which He would have cherished (St. Matt. xxiii. 37). But His own country of Judæa had given Him much

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St. John iv. 43-54. opposition and little support, and so He had gone to the more sympathetic neighbourhood of Galilee. This seems the most likely interpretation of the statement. Another interpretation would lead us to understand that our Lord was simply avoiding His own native place of Nazareth, and that while He went into the province of Galilee, He avoided the place where He had been brought up and which had shown such hostility to His preaching (St. Luke iv. 16-30). Both interpretations, however, mark the rising tide of opposition to our Lord in various quarters, and so He chooses more suitable centres where His work may go on without interruption.

St. John, moreover, is careful to mark the more receptive character of the Galilæans, in contrast to the attitude of the people of Jerusalem (v. 45). Galilæans probably formed the greater part of those who believed on His name at the Passover (ii. 23), and therefore it was to Galilee, to a people receptive of His work, that our Lord came ; and He came in particular to Cana, where a very favourable atmosphere prevailed owing to the influence of His first sign.

All that we have stated so far is a necessary preliminary to the consideration of the second great sign at Cana. Amid the confused feelings of opposition and of partial belief, there was an element of belief amongst the Galilæans more especially, which was based purely upon the evidence of the miracles. The narrative now shows us how this partial faith is raised to its proper level.

Our Lord's arrival at Cana was soon noised abroad,

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and the news of His coming spread quickly to **St. John** Capernaum, which was some twenty-five miles **iv. 43-54.** away. From the seaside town there came to our **The** Lord a certain nobleman whose son was very ill. **nobleman.** The "nobleman" was in reality a "king's officer" (R.V. margin), and he was evidently an official at the court of Herod Antipas. He is identified by some writers as Chusa, Herod's steward (St. Luke viii. 3), whose wife probably "ministered unto Christ of her substance" in gratitude for the healing of her son, whilst others are inclined to identify him as Manaen, the foster-brother of Herod (Acts xiii. 1). Whatever his identity may be, the "King's officer" had no doubt heard of the miracle performed at Cana, and also of the miracles performed at Jerusalem. He felt that our Lord was no ordinary man, and his love for his son makes him clutch at any straw. The desperate condition of the boy prompts him to go to Christ with the request that He will go down to Capernaum and heal his son.

The reply of our Lord to the request of the father seems at first sight somewhat abrupt, for He says to the man, "Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe" (v. 48). It may be that in these words our Lord was criticising the general tendencies of the Galilaëans (ii. 23-25), since His remarks are in the plural and not addressed merely to the individual suppliant, or it may have been a reflection on the atmosphere which prevailed in the court of Herod (cf. St. Matt. xiv. 2; St. Luke xxiii. 8). At all events our Lord's words were not a rejection of the man's faith, but He meant to probe the man

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St. John iv. 43-54. and to put his faith in its true light. For a little reflection will make it evident that the faith of the king's officers was not a faith in Christ Himself. There was no more in the courtier's request than he might have put to an ordinary Rabbi who by prayer and intercession might obtain the boy's recovery.

This is further brought out in the agonised cry of the father when he feels the apparent rebuff in our Lord's reply. "Sir," he cries, "come down ere my little child die." Again we see the limitations of the man's belief. It is merely the belief which he might have had in a celebrated doctor or physician whose skill might restore his boy, or it is still only the belief which he might have had in a noted Rabbi who by his prayers at the bedside may be the means of securing help from God. Moreover, whatever else there was in the father's belief in Christ, there was evidently little of a spiritual or religious character in it. So far as we can judge the man was simply looking upon Christ as a worker of wonders, and his desperate need had brought him to Christ in the hope that the Worker of Wonders might snatch his boy from the jaws of death.

It is for this reason that our Lord puts the king's officer to the test with the words, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." Christ's words were a challenge to the man's previous inferior or limited faith. The command of Christ took the father's thoughts away from any idea of our Lord asking God to heal his son, it at once took Christ out of the category of a mere Rabbi specially favoured by God, and it

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focussed the man's mind more directly upon Christ Himself. **St. John iv. 43-54.**

That the command had its effect can be seen. The father may have looked at Christ, and may have seen there what he had never realised before. But the command carried conviction to an extraordinary degree. His boy lay dying twenty-five miles away, and here in Cana he heard the assurance from Christ that his son would not die! It was a great act of faith which believed the word of Christ, about what meant so much to him. But the father pinned his faith to Christ's word, and he was evidently so satisfied that he did not hurry back at once, but stayed the night at Cana. Next day, however, he hurried off home, and as he was descending the slope towards Capernaum he met his servants coming to greet him with the joyful news that his son was living. The fact of the father inquiring "the hour when he began to amend" shows that he had had the conception of a gradual recovery only on the part of his son. There was this limitation still in his belief in the word of Christ. From the lips of his servants, however, he heard the striking news that at the very hour of Christ's statement his son was cured.

The complete recovery of his son brought conviction to the King's officer, and not only to him but also to all his household. His wife and the members of his house obviously knew the purpose of his journey, and the successful issue of it made some sort of belief inevitable. But the particular point that St. John notes is that the belief is now personal **Personal faith.**

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St. John iv. 43-54. to Christ. The belief of the father had been first of all confined to the miracles or signs, and he could see nothing beyond them. Then his belief had advanced to a trust in the word of Christ, a trust of great moment because the life of his beloved boy was involved in it. Now at length the belief had passed from the signs and words of Christ, to a belief in our Lord Himself; he was in the right attitude for the true follower of Christ.

Sorrow
leads to
Christ.

When we come to ask what lessons this incident has for ourselves we at once feel drawn to the way in which the need of the father was met so fully by our Lord. The human side of the narrative inevitably compels our attention. So to-day sorrow may often-times bring a man to the feet of Christ. Many parents have been brought near to Christ through the sufferings of their children. They cry to God to heal their little one, they cry to Him to ease their own hearts which are torn by the weakness or suffering of their child, and God in His loving mercy and tenderness brings the peace which parents seek.

Important as this truth is, the main lesson stands out in virtue of the fact that St. John reminds us that "this is the second sign that Jesus did, when He was come out of Judæa into Galilee."

The first sign at Cana had shown that our Lord was the Master of nature, and His interview with Nicodemus, which followed soon after the first sign, had for its main point the fact that human nature needs transforming through Christ. Here, however, in the healing of the son of the king's

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officer, our Lord says, "Go, thy son liveth (v. 51), **St. John** and the words involve two truths. On the one **iv. 43-54.** hand, in giving the courtier the life of his son our Lord shows that He is the Master of all nature, not merely inanimate but also animate. In short, He can give life. On the other hand, the command **The** "Go," implies an act of faith on the part of the **life-giver.** courtier to whom the command was given. It was faith in Christ, therefore, which give the courtier the life of his son. And the broad underlying truth connected with the incident is wrapped up in that fact. St. John has given us seven great miracles in his Gospel, and each of them is a "sign" of some truth connected with our Lord. At Cana the first sign revealed Him as the Lord of Nature, which He can therefore change. At Cana, again, His second sign showed that faith in Him can give the life which all men need. In between the two signs comes the record of the interview with Nicodemus, who is told by Christ that human nature needs changing and requires new life "from above," which can be obtained from Christ. And in Cana comes the object lesson which drives home the truth. If faith in Christ can give life to a dying son, faith in Christ can give life to all men. It is faith in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ which will give us life from Him.

PRAYER

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who art the Author and Giver of Life, we pray Thee to give us grace to cast ourselves wholly upon Thee; Enable us always to see that Thou art the

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St. John Life of men : Clear from us the mists of sin that sometimes
iv. 43-54. hide Thee from our eyes ; Enlighten our souls that we
may see Thee Who art invisible : Increase our faith in Thee :
Let no doubts or difficulties hide us from Thy Presence,
and may we so serve Thee in this life by Thy Spirit, that in
the life to come we may live in joy with Thee for ever,
We ask it for Thy Name's sake. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XXI

THE HEALING OF THE IMPOTENT MAN

After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time *in that case*, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me. Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry *thy* bed. He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk. Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk? And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in *that* place. Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee. The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.—ST. JOHN v. 1-15.

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St. John MANY of the incidents recorded by St. John are
v. 1-15. not to be found in the other Gospels. One reason for this is that the first three Gospels have concentrated mainly on the events which took place in Galilee. St. John, however, in pursuance of his method of choosing matters germane to the object he has in view (xx. 31), reverts to many things which the other Gospels do not notice, and in particular he refers to many events in Jerusalem which they do not mention. Thus the incident of the healing of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda is now related by St. John, and he does so because, on the one hand, it will explain the rift between our Lord and the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem, whilst in addition it has a definite bearing upon the great subject of how eternal life is obtainable through Christ.

After the healing of the son of the king's officer, our Lord probably returned to His home at Capernaum, and no doubt went away afterwards into the country districts of Galilee to continue His work of preaching. Later on, He went up to Jerusalem on the occasion of a certain feast. There seems some uncertainty as to which particular feast was then in progress, but most probably it was the Feast of Purim which commemorated the preservation of the Jews in Persia from the massacre threatened by Haman (Esther viii. ix.). It was not obligatory for Jews to go to Jerusalem for this feast, but at the same time it was an occasion for much joyousness on the part of the Jews, who made a point of showing great benevolence by giving away presents and by caring

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especially for the poor and afflicted. The healing **St. John** of the impotent man by Christ was therefore quite **v. 1-15.** in keeping with the spirit of the feast, though this is not to suggest that this was merely the motive for the performance of the miracle.

Our Lord encountered the impotent man at the **The Pool of Bethesda.** The pool, according to discoveries made in 1888, is some 55 feet long and $12\frac{1}{2}$ feet in breadth, and a flight of 24 steps leads down into it. The pool was evidently fed by an intermittent spring of water which had healing mineral qualities in it. The bubbling of the water, or the troubling of the water (*v. 7*), would betoken the influx of the water from the hidden spring, and no doubt the influx was only for a few minutes at intervals of one or two days. Consequently sick people remained by the pool to wait for the influx of water, and in order to shelter them five porches, or colonnades, had been erected. As Thomas Fuller puts it, "the mercy of God was seconded by the charity of man: God gave the cure, men built the harbour for impotent persons."

It was to this "House of Mercy," or "House of Compassion," that our Lord made His way, and on the occasion of His visit He found the usual crowd of sick people afflicted with blindness, paralysis, and other ailments. These were grouped in the porches waiting for the moment when the water surged into the pool. Amongst those lying in the shade of the colonnades was a man who was evidently well known to all who frequented the pool. He had been for thirty-eight years a victim to some

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St. John
v. 1-15.

The
Impotent
Man.

disease which deprived him of the power of walking. No indication is given of the nature of the complaint, but it is evident from our Lord's words in verse 14 that the disease was the result of the man's own sinful indulgence. The depravity of the man's character was common property, so much so that he seems to have been carefully shunned by everybody at the pool (v. 7). The bitterness of the situation no doubt burned itself into the man. Here, close at hand, was the means of cure, but no helping hand was forthcoming to enable him to avail himself of the means so close at hand, and whenever he dragged himself laboriously down the steps to the water, he was always too late to get to the healing stream. So, as time went on, the man would lose hope of ever being cured, he would assume the rôle of permanent invalid, live upon the alms of the generous, and trade upon his illness. It was a man morally inert, and with lower limbs practically dead, who met the eye of Christ.

It is possible that our Lord had heard of the man from the bystanders, and it is possible also that without any such assistance He knew of his apparently hopeless condition. Our Lord's question, however, shows that He knew the man's character through and through. For the question which He put was not quite so superfluous as it seems at first sight. The impotent man's presence at the pool showed apparently that there still lingered a seeming desire for renewed health, but the will to be better was as dead as his withered

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limbs. Sinful indulgence, and a livelihood gained **St. John** by appeals to the pitiful, had caused the atrophy of **v. 1-15.** the man's moral nature, and he seemed to have lost the desire or the will to be restored to health again. Our Lord's question, therefore, was well calculated to galvanise the thoughts of the sick man, when He said, "Are you willing, and do you desire, to be made whole?"

The man felt the challenge in Christ's question; he perceived that there was an implied rebuke in the query. So he burst out with the cry of helplessness which betrayed his isolation in the crowd, "Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me." But if the man felt the implied rebuke in our Lord's question, he also felt a glimmering of hope. The desire for renewed health began to stir within him, and the wish to be again as he was in the days of his unsullied youth began to come back to him. We can imagine him looking with expectation upon Christ, we can picture him thinking that our Lord might wait and help him into the pool when next the waters were stirred, for his expectation was obviously no more than that, when he gave his querulous excuse. But at all events his eyes were fixed on Christ, Who had roused his dormant feelings with the question, "Are you willing to be made whole?" for it implied that Christ could in some way answer His own question. When hope had thus been roused by stimulating the will of the man, then Christ gave the direct command, "Rise, take up

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St. John thy bed, and walk." The impotent man at once
v. 1-15. acted on the faith that had come to him. The voice of convincing authority coming from Christ roused the man to action, and he rose upright from the ground and stood erect, sound in limb after thirty-eight years of impotency. His act of faith in the command of Christ brought new life coursing into his limbs, and he stood forth a new man.

The
keeping
of the
Sabbath.

Since the impotent man was now able to walk, it was obvious that he must carry home his mat, or bed, as Christ told him, because he would no longer be spending his days lying by the Pool of Bethesda. As he was wending his way homeward, however, he was challenged by some of the leading Jews, because in carrying the mat he was infringing the letter of the fourth commandment. The man's action in carrying the mat may seem trivial to us, but it meant a great deal to the Jews, who were not above killing those who contravened their interpretation of the keeping of the Sabbath. They certainly had the letter of the law on their side, as reference to the following passages shows, *i.e.* Exod. xxiii. 12 ; xxxi. 14 ; xxxv. 2, 3 ; Num. xv. 32 ; Jer. xvii. 21, and the carrying of the mat, as well as the act of healing, were both clean contrary to the teaching of the Rabbis.

In response to the questions of the Jews, the healed man throws the responsibility for his action upon his Healer. He was not aware of the identity of our Lord, for the latter was evidently alone at the time of the cure and was unaccompanied by any of His disciples. Moreover, He had disappeared

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after the miracle in order to escape the attention of the multitude who were round the pool. But it is an understandable position that the healed man should throw the responsibility for his technical breach of the Sabbath upon his Healer. It was a mere statement of fact which to an unprejudiced hearer would be quite enough. The Jews, however, were far from being unprejudiced, and the statement of the healed man may therefore imply that his unknown Benefactor would accept the responsibility for whatever technical wrong was done, and that He would be able to vindicate His authority. St. John v. 1-15.

After he had deposited his mat at home, the man made his way to the Temple, with the intention no doubt of giving thanks to God for his restoration to health, and whilst there he again met our Lord. It was then that Christ warned him of the consequences of lapsing again into the sin which had paralysed his life before, and which if again persisted in would inevitably land the man into destruction both here and hereafter (v. 14). Whether the authoritative tone of Christ revealed Him to the man, or whether other things were then said to him by our Lord we are not in a position to tell. All that we can see is that the man had become aware of the identity of his Healer, and that he went off to the authorities to tell them.

It is something of a shock to read of the man's action, because it seems very much like the betrayal of the One Who had been the means of giving him back his health. This might be the case if we took the worst view of the man's action. But it was pro-

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St. John bably no more than the clearing of himself from the
v. 1-15. technical breach of the Sabbath law, and it was
probable also that He felt Christ would be more
than able to justify Himself. We must, moreover,
bear in mind that the man had some faith in Christ,
otherwise he would never have looked to Him for
help, nor would he have acted upon the command
of Christ to get up and walk. In addition, the
question of Sabbath observance was not yet in
dispute between Christ and the Jewish leaders, so
there was nothing, therefore, in the man's action
which would justify us in supposing that by going
to the authorities he was ranging himself on their
side against Jesus of Nazareth. The simplest
explanation, and the one most in keeping with all
the facts, seems to be that when the man knew it
was the new prophet from Nazareth who had healed
him, he told the authorities, and by the telling he
seemed to be appealing to the authority of Christ
for his action in carrying his mat, rather than
condemning Christ. He seemed to say that if
Jesus of Nazareth could bring life to his palsied
limbs, and that if He could give him renewed health
after thirty-eight years of inaction, then surely
He will be able to justify Himself for healing on the
Sabbath and for ordering him to carry his bed.
That the prejudices of the authorities were in no
wise lessened by the knowledge that our Lord was
responsible for the technical breach of the laws
of the Sabbath will be considered when we examine
the rest of the fifth chapter of St. John. Our main
thought for the moment is the impotent man and

The Healing of the Impotent Man

his healing, and we want to get quite clear the **St. John** lessons of the miracle, and to see the relation in **v. 1-15**. which it stands to the main purpose of St. John's teaching about eternal life through Christ.

First and foremost, we see that the debilitated existence of the impotent man was due to sin; it was sin which had paralysed his limbs, sin which paralysed his desire after better things, sin which had kept him so low for thirty-eight years.

But this sinful man is brought face to face with Christ. He is not aware of the identity of Christ, he simply feels that He is no ordinary man, since He has read him as no one else had done. And Christ orders the man to rise and walk. The man does not begin to question the command, he does not speak of the absurdity of such an order to one who like himself had been for years laboriously dragging himself along the ground. The man had faith in Christ, he took Him at His word, and the result was that new life flowed into him, and he became a new man. The definite lesson which St. John wishes to bring home to us is that sinful humanity may have life through faith in Christ. A Message for sinful humanity.

In this great truth we have a further step in the teaching already pointed out in connection with our Lord's great signs. The first sign at Cana had made it clear that the Lord of the world was at work in His own world, and that He could change the nature of one substance into another. The interview with Nicodemus had carried the lesson of this first sign further. Our Lord expressly told Nicodemus that all men needed their nature chang-

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St. John ing if they were to be fit for the kingdom of heaven,
v. 1-15. and He pointed out that the new nature or the new life could be obtained from Himself the Lord of nature and the Lord of life. The second sign of the healing of the son of the king's officer brought into prominence the need for faith in order to ensure life from Christ. Now this third sign of the healing of the impotent man carries us still further, for it shows us that humanity, however depraved and sinful, can obtain life by faith in Christ. There was nothing lovable or attractive in the impotent man; there was nothing, humanly speaking, which seems to make him worthy of the pity and love of Christ. But unlovable as he was, the man was in need, and that was enough for our Lord. He showed Himself willing to help, He proved Himself able to help, and the new life which He gave to the man is the measure of what He will and can do for all sinful humanity which put their faith in Him.

So for us, who are all types of the impotent man, there is the same hope. We may not all have sunk so low as that sinful Jew, and we may not have lost the will for better things as he had done, but nevertheless we all come within the scope of the truth that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." We are all sinful, we need cleansing and healing, we need new life, and we need eternal life. Here plainly written for us in this miracle is the promise of forgiveness and of new life! However sinful we may be, there is the offer of life for all who put their faith in Jesus Christ.

The Healing of the Impotent Man

PRAYER

St. John
v. 1-15.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who didst read the heart of the impotent man at Bethesda, Who didst see his sinful soul, and yet in spite of all his wickedness didst forgive him and endue him with new life ; Look into my soul, cleanse my sinful desires, quicken me to a life of nobler and purer living : Give me the grace of continued faith in Thee that I may ever receive new life from Thyself, a life which by Thy continual help may fructify into life everlasting in Thy Presence in glory. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XXII

THE REVEALER OF THE FATHER

And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do : for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth : and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth *them* ; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgement unto the Son : That all *men* should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation ; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God : and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself : so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself ; And hath given him authority to execute judgement also, because he is the Son of man. Marvel not at this : for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice. And shall come forth ; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

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I can of mine own self do nothing : as I hear, I judge : and my judgement is just ; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of my self, my witness is not true.

There is another that beareth witness of me ; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true. Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man : but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light : and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light.

But I have greater witness than *that* of John : for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. And ye have not his word abiding in you : for whom he hath sent, him ye believe not.

Search the scriptures ; for in them ye think ye have eternal life : and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. I receive not honour from men. But I know you, that ye have not the love of God in you. I am come in my Father's name, and ye receive me not : if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that *cometh* from God only ? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father : there is *one* that accuseth you, *even* Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me : for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words ?—
ST. JOHN v. 16-47.

THE miracle of the healing of the impotent man was St. John of serious consequence to our Lord, for it was the v. 16-47. beginning of that alienation from the leaders of the Jews which led directly to His death. That this should have been the case is a striking testimony to the religious condition of the Jews, since the alienation occurred over the supposed breaking of the Sabbath, which was involved in healing the man, and also in the man carrying his mat. The

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St. John question of motive in the supposed Sabbath-break-
v. 16-47. ing was lost sight of, and the need of the man himself was not considered by the Jews. They simply took the letter of the law which forbade work on the Sabbath, and ignored the moral obligation or the higher motives which might prompt men to an act of charity even on the Sabbath. It was enough for them that work was condemned on the Sabbath ; they agreed with the casuistry of the Rabbis who enumerated some thirty different kinds of work forbidden by the fourth commandment, and therefore the healing of a man who was in no danger of death, and the carrying of a piece of furniture by the healed man, roused them to the utmost indignation. The miracle, surprising as it was, affected the Jews but very little, because the breaking of their Sabbath traditions affected them so much. It is true that they had the letter of the law on their side, but they had lost its spirit, their spiritual insight had become deadened, and so they "sought to slay Christ because He had done these things on the Sabbath day " (v. 16).

This attitude of hostility to Christ on the part of the Jews led Him to the first reasoned explanation of Himself. He answered the accusation of Sabbath-breaking by declaring, "My Father worketh hitherto and I work " (v. 17). He seemed to say that God not only worked in the creation of the world, as Genesis declared, but that the work of the Father has been continued ever since, and that the Sabbath rest of the Father (Gen. ii. 23), has not precluded the performance of continuous work for

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man's benefit ever since (cf. Ps. cxlvii. 8). Moreover, **St. John** the work of the Father since the completion of the **v. 16-47.** Creation is related to the work which our Lord has been doing for men, both before and after His Incarnation (cf. *vv.* 19, 20). God had been continually at work in the world, upholding it and caring for it on all days, Sabbath included, and our Lord Himself had also been doing the same work of mercy and beneficence, of which the incident at Bethesda was merely an illustration.

It was in effect the same attitude which our Lord adopted on other occasions. When He asserted the right of His disciples to food on the Sabbath, and quoted the example of David and the shewbread (St. Mark ii. 23-28), or when He healed the woman "bowed with a spirit of infirmity eighteen years" (St. Luke xiii. 11-17), He justified His actions on the ground that they were in keeping with the original significance of the day. But in addition our Lord here takes the still higher ground that He and the Father are one in the work that He is now doing. If the Jews had become so spiritually blinded that they classed our Lord's work of healing as a formal breaking of the fourth commandment, it is not surprising that they failed to appreciate our Lord's explanation of His action. The only result was an attempt on the part of the Jews to kill him "because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (*v.* 18). The other Gospels make it clear that it was because of the justification of the breaking of the Sabbath

Christ's
unity with
the Father.

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St. John v. 16-47. laws by His acts of healing that the leaders of the Jews determined to remove Christ from their path (cf. St. Matt. xii. 14; St. Mark iii. 6), but St. John also shows that in our Lord's justification of His actions there was the claim to oneness with God, which the Jews in their blindness could only look upon as blasphemy, and as worthy of death.

It is possible that Christ withdrew from the Temple to escape the designs of the Jewish leaders, but the discourse was resumed a little later, and probably in the same place.

In the other Gospels statements made by our Lord with regard to His relation to the Father are not given in much detail. The case is otherwise with St. John, whose purpose is to unfold the Divinity of Christ and all that is involved in it. So in order to justify Himself for His supposed Sabbath-breaking our Lord's revelation of Himself is given with more minuteness than in the first three Gospels. The whole statement can be divided into three sections, the first of which is contained in verses 19 to 30.

In this section Christ continues His justification of Himself for healing the impotent man by referring to the close harmony which exists between Himself and the Father, and He implies that what had been done at Bethesda was just the sort of thing which the Father Himself would have done (v. 19). But in this statement there is an assertion which lifts Christ up into a category far beyond where the Jews had placed the Messiah. Our Lord's reference to Himself as "the Son," and to His "seeing the

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Father," and also to His doing " what He seeth the **St. John** Father do," place Him beyond doubt as " very God **v. 16-47.** of very God," as St. John describes in the first verses of the Gospel.

But because of this oneness of Christ with the Father, He has the life-giving power which the Father has (**v. 21**). The reference in this verse is no doubt to those who are **SPIRITUALLY** dead, just as in verse 28 the reference is to those who are **PHYSICALLY** dead. The power is the same in both cases, however, for it is the power of life-giving possessed by Christ Who is One with God, the source of all life. In unmistakeable terms our Lord states in verse 26 that all the life-giving power which the Father has, is also enjoyed by Himself, the Son. The man, therefore, who hears Christ and believes in Him receives the eternal life of God, and death and judgment are not for him (**v. 24**).

The whole passage is full of the greatest truths, **A fundamental truth.** but the main point running through it is fundamental to the Christian faith, and one upon which all our hopes are based. And the truth is this, viz. that those who believe in Christ and in His message impliedly believe also in the Father Who sent Christ into the world ; a belief of this kind, however, brings men into close personal relationship with the living God ; they therefore are at once " passed from death unto life," they **HAVE** everlasting life.

A statement of such a far-reaching kind would certainly prove difficult of acceptance by men who had failed to see the reflection of God's working in the healing of the impotent man. Nor would it be

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St. John likely to commend itself to those who had already
v. 16-47. made up their minds that there were no grounds
Its for Christ's assertion of His equality with God. Our
evidence. Lord, however, goes on to adduce certain evidence
in support of His statement. He declares that it
is an accepted maxim amongst the Jews that no
one can bear witness in his own favour, and therefore
they will not be likely to accept the truths of Christ
from His own statement, however much His
testimony may be in unison with that of the Father
(*vv.* 31, 32). Our Lord makes it clear that He does
not rest His claims upon the testimony of any
man, whether it be the Baptist or any other man
(*v.* 34), because the "another" referred to in verse 32
is the Father. But whilst the truth of Christ's
divinity is a matter about which the Father and
Christ Himself alone can testify, there were certain
things which should have opened the eyes of men
to this all-important fact. Our Lord thereupon
refers first of all to the witness of the Baptist
(*vv.* 32-35). The leaders of the Jews had sent to
John (*i.* 19), and the Baptist had given his testimony
to the coming Messiah (*i.* 23, 26, 27). John "was a
burning and a shining light," but the light which
he shed only came from Christ who was "the true
Light" (*i.* 9); and the whole testimony of John
should have made it easier for the Jews to believe
in Christ when He came.

In addition to the witness of the Baptist, the
works of Christ should have testified to His unity
with the Father (*vv.* 36-38). In this we have a
thought which is often in the mind of our Lord, as

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we can see from His statements in such passages **St. John** as ix. 3 ; x. 25 ; xiv. 10 ; xv. 24. Christ felt that **v. 16-47.** His whole life and work, His teaching and preaching, His miracles of healing, His bringing happiness and peace to stricken souls, should all have shown men something of the work of the Father. As men saw Him thus engaged they should at once have realised that God was at work in the Person of Christ (cf. xvii. 4).

Moreover, the Father had borne witness to Christ **The** in the Old Testament (vv. 37-39). The Jews had **Father's** not actually seen the Father nor heard His voice, **witness to** but His revelation to them had been given in their **the Son.** sacred books. By prophet and priest God had revealed Himself to Israel, and by His messengers, such as Isaiah, He had unfolded something of His plans which were to be fulfilled in Christ. The record of God and of His purposes was in the Old Testament plain for all the Jews to read. And the Jews had read it, for they did think that in the Scriptures they found eternal life (v. 39). But they did not recognise the Christ to Whom they testified. With all their study, they had missed the essential thing to which the Scriptures referred.

Then our Lord told the Jews the real cause of their unbelief (vv. 40-47), and the reason was summed up in the fact that they had lost the true spirit of Moses to whom they ostensibly looked. They were turning away from Christ Who came in His Father's Name, even though they were ready enough to accept many false Messiahs who came in their own name. More than forty false Messiahs

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St. John were accepted at different times by the Jews. They
v. 16-47. were ready enough to receive self-accredited earthly impostors, but they were not ready to accept Christ Who came with the credentials of heaven. The reason lay in the loss of a true spiritual standard of conduct. They had failed completely to catch the spirit of Moses in whom they trusted, and since they had so signally failed to understand the message of their great law-giver, it was not to be wondered at that they failed to recognise Christ to Whom Moses pointed, and that they failed to understand Christ's message. The Jews who opposed Christ were not the true Israel, they were in no sense the true followers of Moses, or they would inevitably have become the disciples of Christ to Whom Moses had directed the chosen people.

There, for the moment, our Lord's self-revelation ceases ; but the importance of the occasion cannot be overlooked, for it marks the definite rift between Christ and the leaders of the Jews, and we can look forward and see how the threat of violent death became a menace with which He now had to reckon (cf. vii. 21-26). For our own personal consideration, however, there are certain points about which we may well think.

(1) First of all there is the great truth summarised in verses 19 to 29, and the main point of which lies in verse 26. The verses show us the unity of Christ with the Father, and they make it evident that our attitude to Christ is our attitude also to the Father. But because the eternal God gives life to those who look to Him, so those who look to

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Christ receive eternal life from Him. Thus we have St. John this fundamental truth, that belief in Christ gives v. 16-47. a man everlasting life, and when a man has everlasting life he escapes condemnation, and he has no fear of judgement.

(2) While we have this great and glorious fact of everlasting life through belief in Christ brought so clearly to our notice, yet there are also two notes of warning in the narrative. One lies in the hardened notions of the Jews with reference to Sabbath observance. They had so lost sight of the real spirit of the fourth commandment that Sabbath observance had become a burden and not a help. In the same way some of our own religious ideas or religious forms may tend to a similar form of oppression. If our religion, however, becomes a burden and not a burden-bearer then there must be something wrong with it, and we must in some way have lost the true spirit of our faith.

(3) But the question of the observance of the Sabbath was really part of a larger question. It is clear that the Jews of our Lord's day had lost the key to much of the Old Testament and that the real spirit of the Scriptures was hidden from them. There was an Amos needed in the days of our Lord just as much as when the prophet called the people of Israel from a conception of God which was satisfied with the mere ritual of worship. Ceremonial worship and a religion lost in ritual observances had largely killed spirituality, and the eyes of the Jews were veiled in the presence of Christ their long-foretold Messiah. So whatever

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St. John v. 16-47. our ideas of religious observances may be, let us ever be on the watch lest those observances degenerate into a mere formalism which is cramping to the soul. If our conceptions of religion and of religious observances do not bring Christ near to us, then there is something wrong with them. A religion enmeshed in ritual may kill our real perception of God just as truly as it crushed in the Jews the power to read the Mosaic promises aright or to recognise their long-promised Messiah even when they stood in His Presence.

PRAYER

O God, Who hast drawn near to us in the Person of Thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, we thank Thee for the promise of eternal life which Thou dost give to all who believe in Him: Fill us with the realisation that we are even now possessors of the life which comes from Thee, and seal in us the knowledge that our lives are indeed hid with Christ in Thee: And because we are Thine grant that in all our thoughts of Thee we may never hide from ourselves the nearness of Thy Presence: In all our worship may we sing and pray as seeing Thee Who art invisible: And in the reading of Thy holy word may our eyes and ears be ever open to see Thee and to hear Thee speaking and telling us more of Thy wondrous love for us: We ask it in the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XXIII

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH GREAT SIGNS

After these things, Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias. And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased. And Jesus went up into a mountain, and there he sat with his disciples. And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.

When Jesus then lifted up *his* eyes, and saw a great company come unto him, he saith unto Philip, Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat ? And this he said to prove him : for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little. One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes : but what are they among so many ? And Jesus said, Make the men sit down. Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. And Jesus took the loaves ; and when he had given thanks, he distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down ; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost. Therefore they gathered *them* together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten. Then those men, when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet that should come into the world.

When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone. And when even was *now* come, his

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disciples went down unto the sea, And entered into a ship, and went over the sea toward Capernaum. And it was now dark, and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew. So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. But he saith unto them, It is I; be not afraid. Then they willingly received him into the ship: and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went.—ST. JOHN VI. 1-21.

St. John vi. 1-21. ST. JOHN gives no indication at the close of Chapter V. of the result of our Lord's words in Jerusalem, but there are sufficient references in v. 18 and vi. 21 to know that the capital had by now become very unsafe for Christ. He therefore returned again to Galilee, where a more favourable reception awaited Him than in Judæa (cf. iv. 45).

It is probable that a whole year elapsed between the incidents recorded in Chapters V. and VI., and during this time our Lord continued His work of teaching and healing. None of the miracles of healing are described in detail, but verse 2 shows that these miracles or "signs" had the usual effect of drawing large numbers of people to Christ. The verbs in verse 2 are all in the imperfect tense, and the sense of the verse is that "a great multitude kept on following Him because they were continually beholding the signs which He was constantly performing on those who were sick." This verse, therefore, is a summary of the continuous work of our Lord after He left Jerusalem.

In the interval also the Twelve had been sent forth to preach, and their Mission had had the

The Fourth and Fifth Great Signs

effect of rousing a good deal of enthusiasm for the **St. John** kingdom of God, and a corresponding enthusiasm **vi. 1-21.** in the minds of the disciples (St. Luke ix. 1-6, 10, and cf. x. 17-20).

Moreover, the Baptist had recently met his death at the hand of Herod Antipas (St. Matt. xiv.), and the report of Christ's doings had roused superstitious fears in the mind of the Tetrarch that He was really the Baptist risen from the dead. He therefore tried to get hold of Christ, and probably with no friendly intent (St. Luke ix. 9).

All these circumstances combined to cause our Lord to withdraw to the hilly district on the eastern side of Galilee. His own personal safety was involved, but there was also the need of His disciples. Their own successful mission, the death of the Baptist, these and such-like things needed talking over, for they wanted the guidance of their Master on the apparent contradiction between their own successful mission and the triumph of evil in the person and work of Herod (cf. St. Mark vi. 7-13, 29-31). Therefore He invited them to go apart with Him for the rest and instruction which they needed.

The desires of our Lord for His disciples, however, **The Five** were frustrated. The multitude which had been **Thousand.** following Him for some time had evidently found their way to the foot of the slope on the upper reaches of which Christ and His disciples were resting. They had also become reinforced with a crowd of pilgrims who were wending their way to the Passover at Jerusalem. From the top of the

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St. John vi. 1-21. hilly district to which He had retired our Lord looked down to see a crowd of five thousand men, besides women and children, all waiting for Him. They had evidently pressed on in their efforts to find Christ, so that the evening was now come and they were obviously in need of food, whilst they were some distance from places where food was obtainable.

Both St. Matthew and St. Mark speak of our Lord's compassion when He saw the people in their need, but St. John's attention is rather concentrated on the miraculous power which Christ was to show. St. John has his thoughts centred always on the Divine eternal Christ revealing Himself by His "signs" to those who have the spiritual insight to read their message. So it is here. We notice this with regard to our Lord's question to Philip, *i.e.* "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Some commentators have imagined that it was an inquiry addressed to Philip because he was intimately acquainted with the neighbourhood (i. 44), or that the question was merely designed to test his faith (v. 6), since he was a man who evidently needed stimulating (cf. xiv. 8). Whatever element of truth there may be in such suggestions, St. John is careful to keep Christ's miraculous power clear. Our Lord "Himself knew what He would do" (v. 6), so that the question was not asked simply for information.

Philip's reply serves to mark the impossibility of the need of the multitude being satisfied. Since the pay of a workman was a penny a day, the

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two hundred pence required was a sum the disciples **St. John** did not possess, even had they been near the shops **vi. 1-21.** or traders from whom they might have bought the necessary bread. Andrew, however, with that readiness which was characteristic of him, turns to His Master with his practical suggestion, "There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes." At the same time, he feels that his suggestion bears on the ludicrous, and so he hastens to add, "but what are they among so many?"

The small boy (such is the literal Greek) to whom Andrew referred, had probably come to the crowd in the hope of selling the loaves and fishes. It was very poor fare which he had, for it was the kind of food which only the poorest of people would eat, and was contemptuously referred to as food for cattle.

Our Lord accepted the offer of this meagre fare, and instructed His disciples to make the men sit down in regular order upon the grass (cf. St. Mark vi. 39, 40). When they were all seated in companies upon the ground, Christ took the loaves and fishes, gave thanks for them, and then distributed them to the disciples. In the blessing and in the distributing a miracle of increase took place, for the five barley loaves and the two small fishes became multiplied till they were sufficient to feed the whole crowd of five thousand men, beside the women and children who were also present (St. Matt. xv. 21).

**The loaves
and fishes
multiplied.**

The immediate result of the miracle was that

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St. John the crowd acclaimed Christ as "the prophet"
vi. 1-21. foretold by Moses (Deut. xviii. 15). The miraculous feeding recalled the feeding of their forefathers in the wilderness by Moses, and they thought they saw in Christ the fulfilment of the long-expected prophecy. But while this was the idea which first gripped their mind, a little reflection made them feel that Christ was indeed the Messiah. In their enthusiasm they would at once have proclaimed Him as their Messianic King (v. 15). They would have swept on with Him at once to Jerusalem and proclaimed Him king in the capital; and there was every reason to think that the movement would have met with temporary success. The Jews as a body were incensed against Herod because of his treatment of the Baptist, and the contagious enthusiasm of those who had seen the miracle might easily have roused Palestine against him. But whatever other motives there might have been at work, the feeling of the five thousand men was that with Christ as king the prophecies about the "good time" for the Jews would begin. So in their blind enthusiasm they would have forced Christ, whether He would or no, to be their Messianic King.

The
materialism
of the
people.

There was nothing joyous for our Lord, however, in such an acclamation. The whole spiritual significance of His action was obscured to the Jews by the mere materialism which only saw their bodily wants supplied (cf. v. 26). They wanted Christ as their king to ensure always an era of plenty, but there was no recognition of His Divinity.

Our Lord felt that there was a grave danger for

The Fourth and Fifth Great Signs

the disciples in the attitude of the crowd, and St. John St. Matthew tells us that He **CONSTRAINED** His **vi. 1-21.** disciples (xiv. 22) to go to the other side of the lake while He sent the multitudes away. Christ had no wish to be involved in political movements, and He was anxious to keep His disciples clear of men whose contagious enthusiasm might easily carry them in directions where He Himself had no intention of going. Yet our Lord Himself found it very difficult to curb the excited crowd; some of them evidently refused to go, but waited about until the next morning (v. 22).

After dismissing the multitude, Christ went up again into the hilly district close to the eastern shores of the lake in order that He might have a time of quiet communion with the Father. It was one of those occasions of bitter disappointment to our Lord, when the spiritual content of His preaching was lost to those whose eyes were set on material things. So, as in all the great crises of His life, Christ withdrew to be alone with the Father.

While He was alone in the hill, the disciples, in obedience to our Lord's arrangements for them, entered a boat to go over the lake to Capernaum. They started somewhere between seven and nine in the evening on their journey of six or seven miles, and they had not gone far before a sudden storm arose. The sea of Tiberias, lying in a hollow surrounded by hills, was often affected by winds, which came rushing through the gorges of the hills and lashed the lake suddenly into storm. This was the experience of the disciples that night. They were

The storm
on the
lake.

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St. John battling against wind and storm for about six
vi. 1-21. hours, and during that time had only completed two-thirds of their journey.

The disciples with their practical knowledge of seamanship would not have been inclined to overestimate the danger they were in, since it was an experience which without doubt had often befallen them when they were engaged in fishing. The danger was there, however, and it was while they were still struggling with their difficulties that they beheld their Master walking towards them on the sea. The sudden appearance of Christ filled the men with terror. This is all the more astonishing since they had evidently expected to meet Him somewhere on the journey. The phrase, "Jesus had not yet come to them" (*v. 17, R.V.*) seems to imply that He had made arrangements to meet them at some point on the journey, but now when He meets them in this unexpected way they cannot believe it. The other Evangelists tell us that the disciples thought they saw a spirit, and that in their agitation they failed to perceive that it was their Master drawing near to them; and so they cried out in their fear (*St. Mark. vi. 49, 50*). Christ reassured them, however, with the words, "It is I; be not afraid," and as soon as their fear was removed they received Him into their boat.

The wonder of the disciples at Christ's appearance on the water and His stilling of the wind and storm are mentioned in the other gospels, though not by St. John. Some writers, however, have thought that there was another miracle or sign

The Fourth and Fifth Great Signs

referred to in verse 21, where St. John says that St. John after the disciples had received Christ into their ship, "immediately," or "straightway," "the ship was at the land whither they were going." These writers have imagined that there would be a sort of anti-climax in Christ walking on the water, and afterwards allowing Himself to remain seated in the boat whilst the disciples rowed the remaining distance to land. There seems something forced in such an interpretation, however. There would be no greater incongruity in Christ sitting in the boat whilst the disciples rowed, than in buying food to eat after the miraculous feeding of the five thousand men. All Christ's miracles were performed with a purpose, and the purpose is usually quite clear. In the present instance the disciples were in great difficulty; they were expecting their Master, and their Master fulfilled His promise in spite of all the natural obstacles in the way. His Presence was wanted to help them, and He came to them triumphing over all the limitations which sea and distance would have put upon Him. When the danger was removed, then together they continued their journey until they reached the shore.

Such are the two great miracles or signs which St. John has recorded, and we have now to consider the truths which the signs are meant to convey. To discover these truths we must always bear in mind St. John's purpose as described in xx. 30, 31, and we must also consider the relation of the signs to what precedes and follows them.

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St. John vi. 1-21. With this to guide us we can see first of all that our Lord's words at Bethesda had been prompted by the healing of the sinful impotent man. The great lesson of that sign had been that sinful men could all obtain life through faith in Christ. This truth was elaborated in the discourse which followed, and the essential facts are found in v. 21, 25, 28. In these three verses it is stated that our Lord as the Son gives life just as the Father does. He can give life to the spiritually dead just as He can give life to the physically dead. The claim on the part of Christ was a stupendous one, and it is not very surprising that men were slow to believe it. St. John therefore places the Feeding of the Five Thousand immediately after the discourse of chapter five, and the deliberate sequence seems to say this, *i.e.* Here on the one hand is our Lord making this great claim as the Life-giver, and it is a claim which many do not find it easy to accept at first. But then here is Christ feeding five thousand men in a miraculous way; He can multiply bread and fish, He has control over the things which are necessary for the life of men. By His own supernatural power He can use natural means in a supernatural manner to preserve and ensure the life of men.

Then St. John adds the sign of the walking on the water, which carries the lesson of the previous sign still further. The second of the two signs teaches that our Lord's Presence is not limited by material obstacles. Sea and space did not keep Him from the disciples in their need, and so the

The Fourth and Fifth Great Signs

world of material things is no hindrance to Him **St. John**
now. Therefore, when Christ offers life to men, **vi. 1-21.**
and when men wonder how the life can really be
given to them by Christ, then they can think of
these two signs, and they will see that all the limi-
tations of the things of this world are no hindrance
to our Lord when He offers to give them the eternal
life of God.

So we can meditate again upon these two well-
known miracles and we can see in them some
helpful lessons.

(1) The thoughtful loving-kindness of Christ is
apparent in the whole of the circumstances. There **The**
is His concern for the disciples when He wishes to **Saviour's**
go apart with them to help them in their perplexity **care.**
about the death of the Baptist. There is His
regard for the multitude which culminated in the
miraculous increase of food for their needs. There
is His care also for the toiling disciples as they
struggled through the night against wind and
wave. These are the facts which are uppermost in
our thoughts when we read the narrative first, and
it suggests something of the love and care which
our Lord has for us to-day. Our needs and our
anxieties are known to Him, and as we bring them
to Him we know that He will help us just as He
helped the multitude, and just as He helped His
disciples. "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and
He shall sustain thee," said the Psalmist, and we
who read of our Lord's loving thoughtfulness in
these miracles can approach Him with greater
assurance than even the writer of the Psalm.

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St. John (2) Then there is the great lesson that there is
vi. 1-21. no difficulty for Christ in giving us eternal life. The world of material things may seem so important because it is ever present with us, but Christ is greater than the world He made, and Life is more important than the material things He created. It is not hard, therefore, for Christ to give us life. He gave renewed life to the sinful impotent man, He ensured life to the five thousand in need of food, and He is not bounded by natural laws; these things are written for us here. If He could do these things, He can also give us the life for which we look; for in Him is Life.

**Life in
Him.**

**Christ in
everyday
life.**

(3) Whilst the lesson behind the two signs has its direct bearing upon the great truth of eternal life, it has also its own application to us in the ordinary affairs of life. We sometimes think of Christ's love and of our own needs; we are conscious of His loving tenderness for us, but we wonder how He can really intervene in the things of this world in order to help us. When such thoughts come to us let us never forget that Christ is the Lord of this world and that everything is under His direction. He can therefore order things as He thinks best. He can use the things of this world and constrain them to His purposes, and He can make everything work together for good to those who love Him. It suggests, therefore, a close dependence by faith on the loving providence of our Lord and Master Who will not suffer His followers to remain unaided in time of need.

The Fourth and Fifth Great Signs

PRAYERS

St. John
vi. 1-21.

O Lord Jesus Christ, the Creator of the Universe, Who made the world and all things that are therein, and Who ordereth all things both in heaven and earth: Enlighten our understanding that we may believe and know that nothing is impossible with Thee: Since Thou art the Author of all things, Thou art the Author of life, and Thou art the Giver of life to-day: Teach us therefore to rely entirely upon Thy promise that he that believeth on Thee hath everlasting life and is passed from death unto life. We ask it for Thy Name's sake. *Amen.*

O Lord, Who art the Helper of the helpless, and Whose mercy is over all; Thou dost throw the arms of Thy protection around us in all our hours of need: We are Thine and all our needs are the subject of Thy concern: We cast ourselves upon Thy protection, beseeching Thee to lighten our difficulties, and to strengthen us with the grace to persevere in running our Christian race. In Thine own Name we ask it. *Amen.*—(T. W. G.)

XXIV

CHRIST THE BREAD OF LIFE

The day following, when the people which stood on the other side of the sea saw that there was none other boat there, save that one whereinto his disciples were entered, and that Jesus went not with his disciples into the boat, but *that* his disciples were gone away alone ; (Howbeit there came other boats from Tiberias nigh unto the place where they did eat bread, after that the Lord had given thanks :) When the people therefore saw that Jesus was not there, neither his disciples, they also took shipping, and came to Capernaum, seeking for Jesus. And when they had found him on the other side of the sea, they said unto him, Rabbi, when camest thou hither ? Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you : for him hath God the Father sealed. Then said they unto him, What shall we do that we might work the works of God ? Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent. They said therefore unto him, What sign shewest thou then, that we may see, and believe thee ? what dost thou work ? Our fathers did eat manna in the desert ; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven ; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life : he that cometh to me shall never hunger ; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. But I said unto you, That ye also have seen me, and believe not. All that the

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Father giveth me shall come to me ; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out. For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day. And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life : and I will raise him up at the last day. The Jews then murmured at him, because he said, I am the bread which came down from heaven. And they said, Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know ? How is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven ? Jesus therefore answered and said unto them, Murmur not among yourselves. No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him : and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me. Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever : and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us *his* flesh to eat ? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life ; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father : so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven : not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead : he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. These things said he in the synagogue, as he taught in Capernaum. Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard *this*, said, This is an hard saying ; who can hear it ? When Jesus knew in himself that his disciples murmured at it, he said unto them, Doth this offend you ?

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What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where he was before ? It is the spirit that quickeneth ; the flesh profiteth nothing : the words that I speak unto you, *they* are spirit, and *they* are life. But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him. And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.

From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away ? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go ? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus answered them, Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil ? He spake of Judas Iscariot *the son* of Simon : for he it was that should betray him, being one of the twelve.—ST. JOHN VI. 22-71.

St. John vi. 22-71. THE hopes raised in the minds of those who had seen the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand had been very strong, and these hopes still remained in spite of the way in which Christ had set His face against them. It was no light impression which our Lord had made on these men, and their determination to make Him their Messianic King was not a mere passing whim. The miracle had seized their imagination and had stirred up their patriotic feelings, and even when Christ repulsed them they did not altogether abandon their ideas. They may have felt that He doubted their loyalty to the Messianic idea as revealed in Himself, or that He hesitated to accept their devotion and homage because He was not quite sure of Himself, and was vacillating in His mind. Therefore, when our Lord sent His disciples away and withdrew Himself into the mountain alone, many of the men still

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remained, hoping probably that on reflection He St. John would accept their devotion and would allow them vi. 22-71. to march to Jerusalem under His leadership.

They remained where they were until the next day, and discovered no sign of Christ appearing again, nor of the return of the disciples. They therefore went over the lake by boat, and made their way to Capernaum in search of Christ. Since Capernaum was now our Lord's home (ii. 12, and see chapter xiii, *supra*), the men went to one of the places where He was in the habit of teaching, and there they found Him. Their cry, "Rabbi, when camest Thou hither?" (v. 25), is the statement of men who saw something of the miraculous in the appearance of Christ at Capernaum. They had seen Him go alone into the mountain (v. 15), and they had witnessed the disciples departing by themselves. Hence they could not understand how He could have crossed the sea, since no boats had been left behind after the disciples went (v. 22); they felt that the Worker of the miracle of the bread and fishes must have crossed in some miraculous fashion, though they were not aware of the walking on the sea.

The attitude of these men to Christ, therefore, was simply that of those who were on the look-out for the marvellous, and it did not commend itself to our Lord, because the great sign had only tended to give them very materialistic views about Him and His work. It is this which accounts for the apparently abrupt greeting which He gives them (vv. 26, 27), but it was in reality no more abrupt than His opening words to Nicodemus (iii. 3);

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St. John vi. 22-71. it was a greeting calculated to force them to think of other things than the mere outward form of the miracle which they had seen. They were concerning themselves only with the material advantages they had received from the miracle (v. 26), and they were wrapped up in thoughts about the further political and material benefits which would ensue with Christ as the King of Israel. This it is which accounts for the exhortation that they shall not "Labour for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (v. 27); it is a challenge to turn from thoughts of the miracle to the thing signified by the miracle. But with this challenge our Lord reveals the truth to which the miracle pointed, viz. the gift of everlasting life which Christ the Son of man will give. God has sealed or authenticated Christ by miracles, of which the feeding of the five thousand was an example, and therefore if Christ could feed them in a miraculous way with ordinary bread He could also feed them with bread which is everlasting. This is the sort of bread, or "meat," for which they are to labour.

External religion.

The reply of the men is characteristic of the attitude of the average Jew of the time, *i.e.* What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? (v. 28). They think of the round of religious duties to be performed, of the work of the law, of the tithes and the sacrifices. Their thoughts are purely of external things and not of an internal spiritual experience; they regard everlasting life as something to be worked for and something to be

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obtained by performing a round of religious duties, St. John supposedly pleasing to God. Our Lord gave what **vi. 22-71.** has been well described as "the Christian answer to the Jewish question," i.e. "This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him Whom He hath sent" (v. 29). He says in effect that while the round of religious duties has its place and importance, the greatest work of all is to have faith in Christ Whom God hath sent. A man cannot do anything more important than give himself to Christ, and this is what is implied by "believing on Him." It is not simply a mental attitude to Christ, though mental assent is a part of belief, but it implies the giving of oneself completely to Christ. Belief, in this sense, is the greatest thing we can offer, and this is the work that God wants.

The implications of our Lord's words in verses 27 and 29 are realised by His hearers, but they evidently did not think that what Christ had done was quite sufficient to prove all that was involved in His demands. Their forefathers had been fed with manna from heaven; but however marvellous the miracle of the previous day may have been, the food had been the ordinary food of the people, and by no means heavenly (vv. 30, 31). They demanded, therefore, an even more miraculous sign than the feeding of the five thousand.

Our Lord's answer is comprehensive (vv. 32, 33). In the first place He denies that it was Moses who **Bread** gave the manna from heaven, as was the general **from** Jewish interpretation of God's gift (cf. Neh. ix. 15), **heaven.** and He implies that although manna was given

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St. John vi. 22-71. from heaven it was not in a real sense "heavenly bread." Then He went on to identify Himself with the bread of God which cometh down from heaven. Moffatt's translation of verses 32 and 33 makes our Lord's meaning quite clear, *i.e.* "What Moses gave you was not the bread from heaven; it is My Father Who gives you the real bread from heaven, for the bread of God is what comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

The reply of the Jews (v. 34) shows that they understood the drift of Christ's words, but it is evident that their thoughts were still concentrated on manna and on their own physical needs, rather than on Christ and on eternal life. Our Lord's reply (v. 35) was therefore meant to focus their attention on two things, *i.e.* on Himself instead of on the bread, for the "I" in the phrase "I am the bread of life" is emphatic; and on the spiritual instead of on the material. He is trying to narrow their thoughts to Himself, and not to the things He gives. He can indeed multiply the barley loaves to give physical life, but He Himself is the Bread of eternal life for those who believe in Him. The same idea is repeated later in verses 48, 51, and 58, and the great truth contained in the simile is that Christ Himself is the eternal sustenance for all who put their faith in Him.

It is probable that our Lord's words at once caused a good deal of excited comment amongst His hearers, and for the moment the dialogue between Him and the crowd ceases. What follows in verses 36 to 40 is in the nature of reflections on

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the part of our Lord, and not addressed to the Jews, **St. John** for when the latter reply it is to the statement in **vi. 22-71.** verse 35 that they address themselves. These five verses really contain our Lord's reflections, possibly in the form of a soliloquy, upon the refusal of the Jews to accede to His invitation to believe in Him. There is nothing in the words of any crude theory of predestination, as some people have imagined from a misreading of verse 37, for it is plainly stated in verse 40 that everlasting life is for every one who believes in Christ. When our Lord, however, sees so many of the Jews in close touch with Himself, when He thinks of the way in which they see Him and hear Him and yet do not believe in Him, He feels it is one of those inscrutable things for which there is no explanation. At the same time He knows that it all lies in the will of the Father, and since His work on earth is simply to do the will of the Father, He accepts the fact.

In verse 41 the narrative is taken up again with the reply of the Jews to our Lord's reference to Himself as the Bread of Life (v. 35). "The Jews" were evidently the local elders of the synagogue at Capernaum, where Christ and His people were known, and they cannot understand why He should declare that He had come down from heaven. Their reference to our Lord is somewhat contemptuous in tone, "How can this Jesus, Who is known to all of us, say of Himself, I came down from heaven?"

In reply (vv. 43-46), our Lord goes back to what is found in verses 36 to 40. He says in effect that it is the work of the Father to draw men to a belief

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St. John vi. 22-71. in Christ, but the Father only works with men, and He needs the co-operation of men. The position of the Jews, however, is that they are still in doubt about Christ, and their sense of spiritual want is also not yet realised. The prophet Isaiah had looked forward to a time when all men would be willing to be taught by God (Isa. liv. 13), but the Jews were not in that condition, for they had not yet believed in Christ, and therefore they could not obtain the blessings possible from the Father. In order, therefore, to make the position clearer, our Lord became more explicit about Himself (vv. 47-51). First He asserts, what He had already stated before, that the man who believes in Him hath everlasting life, and He associates this great truth with the statements that He is "the bread of life," "the living bread which came down from heaven," that "if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever," and that the bread is His flesh which He will give for the life of the world.

"Eating
the flesh."

There is here the climax of our Lord's statements, as can be gathered from the heated discussion which took place amongst the Jewish hearers (v. 52). We must be on our guard, however, and not read into the narrative what is not there. To us who are accustomed to straightforward matter-of-fact statements, the idea of feeding upon the flesh of Christ comes as a shock, but that is simply due to our literal way of interpreting such sayings. The thought of "feeding upon the flesh" of Christ, however, did not shock the Jews, because the simile of "feeding on" persons was quite a common one.

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They meant by it that they partook of the strength **St. John** or of the personality of the one upon whom they **vi. 22-71.** "fed." The difficulty of the Jews, therefore, was not about the simile, but about the claim which accompanied the simile, *i.e.* that by "eating the flesh" of Christ, or by receiving His personality or strength, they will live for ever. The emphasis in their question in verse 52 is on "this man," *i.e.* How can **THIS MAN** give us His flesh to eat, so that these wonderful results will follow?

Our Lord therefore gave a more detailed explanation of Himself in order to make the point clear. In verses 53 to 57 He reiterates the need for eating His flesh and drinking His blood, and the reiterated simile emphasises the truth that the Jews must receive Christ just as we know they talked of receiving the Law into themselves. But if a man receives Christ into himself, he lives as Christ lives. The living Father, however, had sent Christ into the world, and because the Father is the eternal source of life, Christ Himself had eternal life, since He is One with the Father and living in union with the Father. Therefore, the man who feeds on Christ in the sense of believing in Him, receives Christ into himself and Christ abides in him. But since Christ is One with the Father the Author and Giver of life, the believer in Christ receives the same eternal life of the Father for himself. It is this which marks the great distinction between feeding on manna and feeding on Christ (v. 58). The Israelites ate the manna, but it had no effect on their spiritual life; the manna enabled the

A spiritual message.

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St. John vi. 22-71. Israelites to live in the wilderness but it had no effect on their eternal future. Those who feed on Christ, however, partake of the life of One Who is eternal, and they will live for ever, for they are sharers in the life everlasting.

Thus our Lord completes His discourse, coming round to the point from which it started in verse 30. His words, however, proved a great difficulty to those who heard them, and even to the body of disciples who had been with Him for some time (v. 60). All the implications of the similes of "bread from heaven," "living bread from heaven," and "eating the flesh of the Son of man" were very plain to the Jews, but the great stumbling-block was the claim of Christ's living unity with the Father which would bring life to those who "feed upon Christ." It was this latter claim which proved a "hard saying" (v. 60). The saying was clear enough to them, and there was nothing obscure to them in our Lord's meaning, the difficulty of the saying lay in the claims of Christ involved in it. There could be no further elucidation at the moment, since personal experience alone could test the truth of His statements. Our Lord, however, bids His puzzled hearers look forward to other events which will bring the reality of His Godhead home to them. He looks forward to the Ascension, which will convince His followers of His unity with the Father; He looks forward to the gift of the Spirit which will follow the Ascension, and when the work of the Holy Spirit will complete and bring home to men His own life-giving offers (vv. 62, 63). When

A hard saying.

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this has been accomplished, then the truth about **St. John** His claims and offers will be seen, and all the **vi. 22-71.** difficulties they had about His Oneness with God will disappear. They will vanish in the knowledge that He is God, One with the eternal Father.

The great revelation of Himself proved too difficult for many of our Lord's hearers. They had been attracted by the miracles and by His teaching, but they found the claims of Christ more than they could accept. There was evidently a large body of people who for some time had kept near to Christ, and had followed Him to be taught by Him. But they could not believe all that was involved in our Lord's statements at Capernaum, and they left Him, they "walked no more with Him" (v. 66). As they slowly departed from Christ, it was with something of wistfulness that He turned to the Twelve with the words, "You also do not wish to go away?" The question was put in a form which suggests a doubt whether the Twelve would or would not follow the example of those who had gone. Very quickly, however, came the reply from St. Peter, "Lord to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and know that Thou art the Holy One of God" (v. 69, R.V.). The Baptist was gone, so they could not go to him; but in any case St. Peter feels that Christ has words which will set them on the way to eternal life (cf. v. 63), and he believes that He is the Holy One of God. It is by no means a full belief in the Divinity of Christ, but it is a confession which reveals that he is very near to the

Peter's
confession.

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St. John vi. 22-71. truth, and it is above all a confession which shows that the Twelve have a complete trust in our Lord, however much they yet fail to realise all that was involved in the revelation of His unity with the Father.

This it is which differentiates Peter and the other ten disciples from Iscariot (*vv.* 64, 70, 71). Whatever changes were taking place in the conceptions of the Eleven about the Person of Christ, they never wavered in their loyalty to our Lord Himself. Their ideas as yet were not full and clear about His Divinity, but they had begun to know Christ, they believed in Him, and they trusted themselves to Him. On the other hand, as the thoughts of Messianic kingship according to Jewish ideas now began to fade away, the hopes of Judas changed, and he began that downward course which brought Christ to Calvary and himself to "the field of blood" (*cf.* Acts i. 19).

Looking back over the narrative there are several things which are worthy of considered reflection.

(1) It will be noticed how the discourse is so intimately connected with the two previous miracles. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand showed that our Lord had miraculous power for giving food to ensure life, and the walking on the water revealed something of His control over nature and that His Presence was in no way circumscribed by natural limits. So whatever the difficulties which lie behind Christ's offer of life through Himself, there is the truth which comes from the two miracles. They are signs of His life-

Christ the Bread of Life

giving power which is bounded by no laws of **St. John** earth, and thus they prepare us for the truth that **vi. 22-71**. He can give us the life which shall last eternally.

(2) Then our Lord's revelation of Himself enables us to understand something more about the life which He offers, and what is mentioned in verse 57 makes this clear. It is the life of the eternal God, the Source of all life, which is offered us by Christ. The everlasting Father, Who brought the world into being and Who is the Maker of all men, He it is Whose life is offered to us by our Lord.

(3) But while this eternal life of the Father is freely offered to all men, there is the essential condition that men shall definitely accept this life by faith in Christ. This truth is brought out by various similes such as "eating the flesh of Christ" (v. 54), "coming" to Christ (v. 37), or "believing on" Him (v. 40). The simile may vary, but the essential truth remains the same, it involves a whole-hearted acceptance of Christ and His words, and a complete surrender of oneself to Him.

(4) It is sometimes urged that when Christ said, "the bread which I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world," He was pointing to Calvary. Such an interpretation is quite possible, though the explanation given above seems to fit in more naturally with the general tenor of the whole of the discourse. In any case, we who read the words to-day know that it is in and through Calvary that we do obtain the life of Christ. Calvary speaks of Redemption, it tells of the means by which our sins were borne by Him, and we know that as we

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St. John vi. 22-71. accept the "finished work" of Christ on Calvary a new life begins for us, the everlasting life which He offers.

(5) So also it is sometimes said that when our Lord was urging men to "eat His flesh and drink His blood" He was pointing them to the Holy Communion. There is no indication, however, that He ever gave the disciples a hint of the ordinance before the actual institution took place, and it is improbable that He said anything about it, since the disciples were not prepared for the abrogation of any of the Jewish ordinances, and certainly not for the passing over of their great national feast, the Passover. As is mentioned in (4) *supra*, our Lord's words arise quite naturally from the particular circumstances under which they were spoken, and they follow in a definite sequence which is quite logical, and there is no need to import any other interpretation than the plain explanation given above. At the same time it is obvious that the words of our Lord at Capernaum refer to the same truth to which the Holy Communion also points, *i.e.* Christ's offer of Himself for the life of mankind, His death on Calvary for our redemption, the need on our part for a definite act of appropriation of His sacrificial death, and the importance of faith in the Eternal Son of the Eternal Father Who gave His life for us.

PRAYER

We give Thee thanks, Almighty God, for the bread of the body that perisheth, and we beseech Thee to give us that bread by which man's higher life is fed, that we, laying

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hold of the life that never dies, may thereby be fitted for **St. John**
the troubles and burdens of this life, and look forward **vi. 22-71.**
with joy to the higher and better life. So may we live in
constant childlike trust in Thee, as to believe, though we
behold it not, that the end of all things is divine, and to
catch the music to which this world is set by Thee. Lead
Thou us from the lower life to the better life, that little
things may lose their power to vex us, and in the midst
of the troubles of this life, we may have the peace of God
that passeth all understanding. Of Thy loving-kindness
and tender mercy hear us, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.—(GEORGE DAWSON.)

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